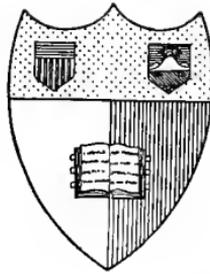


# EUPHORION



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# EUPHORION :

BEING

STUDIES OF THE ANTIQUE AND THE MEDIÆVAL  
IN THE RENAISSANCE

BY

VERNON LEE

[v

Second and Revised Edition

London

T FISHER UNWIN

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1885

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To

WALTER PATER,

IN APPRECIATION OF THAT WHICH, IN EXPOUNDING THE  
BEAUTIFUL THINGS OF THE PAST, HE HAS ADDED TO  
THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS OF THE PRESENT.



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## INTRODUCTION.



## INTRODUCTION.



*Faustus is therefore a parable of the impotent yearnings of the Middle Ages—its passionate aspiration, its conscience-stricken desire, its fettered curiosity amid the cramping limits of imperfect knowledge and irrational dogmatism. The indestructible beauty of Greek art, whereof Helen was an emblem, became, through the discovery of classic poetry and sculpture, the possession of the modern world. Mediævalism took this Helen to wife, and their offspring, the Euphorion of Goethe's drama, is the spirit of the modern world.—J. A. SYMONDS, "Renaissance in Italy," vol. ii. p. 54.*

EUPHORION is the name given by Goethe to the marvellous child born of the mystic marriage of Faust and Helena. Who Faust is, and who Helena, we all know. Faust, of whom no man can remember the youth or childhood, seems to have come into the world by some evil spell, already old and with the faintness of body and of mind which are the heritage of age ; and every additional year of mysterious study and abortive effort has made him more vacillating of step and uncertain of sight, but only more hungry of soul. Postponed and repressed by reclusion from the world, and desperate tension over insoluble problems ; diverted into the channels of mere thought and vision ; there boils within him the energy, the passion, of

retarded youth : its appetites and curiosities, which, cramped by the intolerant will, and foiled by many a sudden palsy of limb and mind, torment him with mad visions of unreal worlds, mock him with dreams of superhuman powers, from which he awakes in impotent and apathetic anguish. But these often-withstood and often-baffled cravings are not those merely of scholar or wizard, they are those of soldier and poet and monk, of the mere man : lawless desires which he seeks to divert, but fails, from the things of the flesh and of the world to the things of the reason ; supersensuous desires for the beautiful and intangible, which he strives to crush, but in vain, with the cynical scepticism of science, which derides the things it cannot grasp. In this strange Faustus, made up of so many and conflicting instincts ; in this old man with ever-budding and ever-nipped feelings of youthfulness, muddling the hard-won secrets of nature in search after impossibilities ; in him so all-sided, and yet so wilfully narrowed, so restlessly active, yet so often palsied and apathetic ; in this Faustus, who has laboured so much and succeeded in so little, feeling himself at the end, when he has summed up all his studies, as foolish as before—which of us has not learned to recognize the impersonated Middle Ages? And Helena, we know her also, she is the spirit of Antiquity. Personified, but we dare scarcely say, embodied ; for she is a ghost raised by the spells of Faustus, a simulacrum of a thing long dead ; yet with

such continuing semblance of life, nay, with all life's real powers, that she seems the real, vital, living one, and Faustus yonder, thing as he is of the present, little better than a spectre. Yet Helena has been ages before Faust ever was ; nay, by an awful mystery like those which involve the birth of Pagan gods, she whom he has evoked to be the mother of his only son has given, centuries before, somewhat of her life to make this self-same Faust. A strange mystery of Fate's necromancy this, and with strange anomalies. For opposite this living, decrepit Faust, Helena, the long dead, is young ; and she is all that which Faust is not. Knowing much less than he, who has plunged his thoughts like his scalpel into all the mysteries of life and death, she yet knows much more, can tell him of the objects and aims of men and things ; nay, with little more than the unconscious faithfulness to instinct of the clean-limbed, placid brute, she can give peace to his tormented conscience ; and, while he has suffered and struggled and lashed himself for every seeming baseness of desire, and loathed himself for every imagined microscopic soiling, she has walked through good and evil, letting the vileness of sin trickle off her unhidden soul, so quietly and majestically that all thought of evil vanishes ; and the self-tormenting wretch, with macerated flesh hidden beneath the heavy garments of mysticism and philosophy, suddenly feels, in the presence of her unabashed nakedness, that he, like herself, is chaste.

Such are the parents, Faustus and Helena ; we know them ; but who is this son Euphorion ? To me it seems as if there could be but one answer—the Renaissance. Goethe indeed has told us (though, with his rejuvenation of Faustus, unknown to the old German legend and to our Marlowe, in how bungling a manner!) the tale of that mystic marriage ; but Goethe could not tell us rightly, even had he attempted, the real name of its offspring. For even so short a time ago, the Middle Ages were only beginning to be more than a mere historical expression, Antiquity was being only then critically discovered ; and the Renaissance, but vaguely seen and quite unformulated by the first men, Gibbon and Roscoe, who perceived it at all, was still virtually unknown. To Goethe, therefore, it might easily have seemed as if the antique Helena had only just been evoked, and as if of her union with the worn-out century of his birth, a real Euphorion, the age in which ourselves are living, might have been born. But, at the distance of additional time, and from the undreamed-of height upon which recent historical science has enabled us to stand, we can easily see that in this he would have been mistaken. Not only is our modern culture no child of Faustus and Helena, but it is the complex descendant, strangely featured by atavism from various sides, of many and various civilizations ; and the eighteenth century, so far from being a Faustus evoking as his bride the long dead Helen of Antiquity, was in itself a

curiously varied grandchild or great-grandchild of such a marriage, its every moral feature, its every intellectual movement proclaiming how much of its being was inherited from Antiquity. No allegory, I well know, and least of all no historical allegory, can ever be strained to fit quite tight—the lives of individuals and those of centuries, their modes of intermixture, genesis, and inheritance are far different ; but if an allegory is to possess any meaning at all, we must surely apply it wherever it will fit most easily and completely ; and the beautiful allegory prepared by the tradition of the sixteenth century for the elaborating genius of Goethe, can have a real meaning only if we explain Faust as representing the Middle Ages, Helena as Antiquity, and Euphorion as that child of the Middle Ages, taking life and reality from them, but born of and curiously nurtured by the spirit of Antiquity, to which significant accident has given the name of Renaissance.

After Euphorion I have therefore christened this book ; and this not from any irrational conceit of knowing more (when I am fully aware that I know infinitely less) than other writers about the life and character of this wonderful child of Helena and Faustus, but merely because it is more particularly as the offspring of this miraculous marriage, and with reference to the harmonies and anomalies which therefrom resulted, that Euphorion has exercised my thoughts.

The Renaissance has interested and interests me, not merely for what it is, but even more for what it sprang

from, and for the manner in which the many things inherited from both Middle Ages and Renaissance, the tendencies and necessities inherent in every special civilization, acted and reacted upon each other, united in concord or antagonism ; forming, like the gases of the chemist, new things, sometimes like and sometimes unlike themselves and each other ; producing now some unknown substance of excellence and utility, at other times some baneful element, known but too well elsewhere, but unexpected here. But not the watching of the often tragic meeting of these great fatalities of inherited spirit and habit only : for equally fascinating almost has been the watching of the elaboration by this double-natured period of things of little weight, mere trifles of artistic material bequeathed to it by one or by the other of its spiritual parents. The charm for me—a charm sometimes pleasurable, but sometimes also painful, like the imperious necessity which we sometimes feel to see again and examine, seemingly uselessly, some horrible evil—the charm, I mean the involuntary compulsion of attention, has often been as great in following the vicissitudes of a mere artistic item, like the Carolingian stories or the bucolic element, as it has been in looking on at the dissolution of moral and social elements. And in this, that I have tried to understand only where my curiosity was awakened, tried to reconstruct only where my fancy was taken ; in short, studied of this Renaissance civilization only as much or as little as I

cared, depends all the incompleteness and irrelevancy and unsatisfactoriness of this book, and depends also whatever addition to knowledge or pleasure it may afford. Were I desirous of giving a complete, clear notion of the very complex civilization of the Renaissance, a kind of encyclopædic atlas of that period, where (by a double power which history alone possesses) you could see at once the whole extent and shape of this historical territory, and at the same time, with all its bosses of mountain and furrows of valley, the exact composition of all its various earths and waters, the exact actual colour and shape of all its different vegetations, not to speak of its big towns and dotting villages;—were I desirous of doing this, I should not merely be attempting a work completely beyond my faculties, but a work moreover already carried out with all the perfection due to specially adapted gifts, to infinite patience and ingenuity, occasionally amounting almost to genius. Such is not at all within my wishes, as it assuredly would be totally without my powers.

But besides such marvels of historic mapping as I have described, where every one can find at a glance whatever he may be looking for, and get the whole topography, geological and botanical, of an historic tract at his fingers' ends, there are yet other kinds of work which may be done. For a period in history is like a more or less extended real landscape: it has, if you will, actual, chemically de-

finer colours in this and that, if you consider this and that separate and unaffected by any kind of visual medium ; and measurable distances also between this point and the other, if you look down upon it as from a balloon. But, like a real landscape, it may also be seen from different points of view, and under different lights ; then, according as you stand, the features of the scene will group themselves—this ridge will disappear behind that, this valley will open out before you, that other will be closed. Similarly, according to the light wherein the landscape is seen, the relative scale of colours and tints of objects, due to pervading light and to distances—what painters call the values—will alter : the scene will possess one or two predominant effects, it will produce also one or, at most, two or three (in which case co-ordinated) impressions. The art which deals with impressions, which tries to seize the real relative values of colours and tints at a given moment, is what you call new-fangled : its doctrines and works are still subject to the reproach of charlatanry. Yet it is the only truly realistic art, and it only, by giving you a thing as it appears at a given moment, gives it you as it really ever is ; all the rest is the result of cunning abstraction, and representing the scene as it is always, represents it (by striking an average) as it never is at all. I do not pretend that in questions of history we can proceed upon the principles of modern landscape painting : we do not know what were the elevations which made per-

spective, what were the effects of light which created scales of tints, in that far distant country of the past ; and it is safer certainly, and doubtless much more useful, to strike an average, and represent the past as seen neither from here nor from there, neither in this light nor that, and let each man imagine his historical perspective and colour value to the best of his powers. Yet it is nevertheless certain that the past, to the people who were in it, was not a miraculous map or other marvellous diagram constructed on the principle of getting at the actual qualities of things by analysis; that it must have been, to its inhabitants, but a series of constantly varied perspectives and constantly varied schemes of colour, according to the position of each individual, and the light in which that individual viewed it. To attempt to reconstruct those various perspective-making heights, to rearrange those various value-determining lights, would be to the last degree disastrous ; we should have valleys where there existed mountains, and brilliant warm schemes of colour where there may have been all harmonies of pale and neutral tints. Still the perspective and colour valuation of individual minds there must have been ; and since it is not given to us to reproduce those of the near spectator in a region which we can never enter, we may yet sometimes console ourselves for the too melancholy abstractness and averageness of scientific representations, by painting that distant historic country as distant indeed, but as its far-off hill ranges

and shimmering plains really appear in their combination of form and colour, from the height of an individual interest of our own, and beneath the light of our individual character. We see only very little at a time, and that little is not what it appeared to the men of the past ; but we see at least, if not the same things, yet in the same manner in which they saw, as we see from the standpoints of personal interest and in the light of personal temper. Scientifically we doubtless lose; but is the past to be treated only scientifically? and can it not give us, and do we not owe it, something more than a mere understanding of why and how? Is it a thing so utterly dead as to be fit only for the scalpel and the microscope?

Surely not so. The past can give us, and should give us, not merely ideas, but emotions: healthy pleasure which may make us more light of spirit, and pain which may make us more earnest of mind; the one, it seems to me, as necessary for our individual worthiness as is the other. For to each of us, as we watch the past, as we lie passive and let it slowly circulate around us, there must come sights which, in their reality or in their train of associations, and to the mind of each differently, must gladden as with a sense of beauty, or put us all into a sullen moral ache. I should hate to be misunderstood in this more, perhaps, than in anything else in the world. I speak not of any dramatic emotion, of such egotistic, half-artistic pleasure as some may get from the alternation of

cheerfulness and terror, from the excitement caused by evil from which we are as safely separated as are those who look on from the infuriate bulls in an arena. To such, history, and the history especially of the Renaissance, has been made to pander but too much. The pain I speak of is the pain which must come to every morally sentient creature with the contemplation of some one of the horrible tangles of evil, of the still fouler intermeshing of evil with good, which history brings up ever and anon. Evil which is past, it is true, but of which the worst evil almost of all, the fact of its having been, can never be past, must ever remain present ; and our trouble and indignation at which is holy, our pain is healthy : holy and healthy, because every vibration of such pain as that makes our moral fibre more sensitive ; because every immunity from such sensation deadens our higher nature : holy and healthy also because, just as no image of pleasurable things can pass before us without gathering about it other images of some beauty which have long lain by in each individual mind, so also no thought of great injustice of man or of accident, of signal whitewashing of evil or befouling of good, but must, in striking into our soul, put in motion there the salutary thought of some injustice or lying legitimation or insidious pollution, smaller indeed perhaps, but perhaps also nearer to ourselves.

Be not therefore too hard upon me if in what I have written of the Renaissance, there is too little

attempt to make matters scientifically complete, and too much giving way to personal and perhaps sometimes irrelevant impressions of pleasure and of pain ; if I have followed up those pleasurable and painful impressions rather more than sought to discover the exact geography of the historical tract which gave them. Consider, moreover, that this very cause of deficiency may have been also the cause of my having succeeded in achieving anything at all. Personal impression has led me, perhaps, sometimes away from the direct road ; but had it not beckoned me to follow, I should most likely have simply not stirred. Pleasant impression and painful, as I have said ; and sometimes the painful has been more efficacious than the other. I do not know whether the interest which I have always taken in the old squabble of real and ideal has enabled me to make at all clearer the different characteristics of painting and sculpture in Renaissance portraiture, the relation of the art of Raphael to the art of Velasquez and the art of Whistler. I can scarcely judge whether the pleasure which I owe to the crowding together, the moving about in my fancy, of the heroes and wizards and hippogriffs of the old tales of Oberon and Ogier ; the association with the knights and ladies of Boiardo and Ariosto, of this or that figure out of a fresco of Pinturicchio, or a picture by Dosso, has made it easier or more difficult for me to sum up the history of mediæval romance in Renaissance Italy ; nor whether the recollection of

certain Tuscan farms, the well-known scent of the sun-dried fennel and mint under the vine-trellis, the droning song of the contadino ploughing or pruning unseen in the valley, the snatches of peasants' rhymes, the outlines of peasants' faces—things all these of this our own time, of yesterday or to-day; whether all this, running in my mind like so many scribbly illustrations and annotations along the margin of Lorenzo dei Medici's poems, has made my studies of rustic poetry more clear or more confused. But this much I know as a certainty, that never should I have tried to unravel the causes of the Renaissance's horrible anomaly of improvement and degradation, had not that anomaly returned and returned to make me wretched with its loathsome mixture of good and evil; its detestable alternative of endurance of vile solidarities in the souls of our intellectual forefathers, or of unjust turning away from the men and the times whose moral degradation paid the price of our moral dignity. I also have the further certainty of its having been this long-endured moral sickening at the sight of this moral anomaly, which enabled me to realize the feelings of such of our nobler Elizabethan playwrights as sought to epitomize in single tales of horror the strange impressions left by the accomplished and infamous Italy of their day; and which made it possible for me to express perhaps some of the trouble which filled the mind of Webster and of Tourneur merely by expressing the trouble which filled my own.

The following studies are not samples, fragments at which one tries one's hand, of some large and methodical scheme of work. They are mere impressions developed by means of study : not merely currents of thought and feeling which I have singled out from the multifold life of the Renaissance ; but currents of thought and feeling in myself, which have found and swept along with them certain items of Renaissance lore. For the Renaissance has been to me, in the small measure in which it has been anything, not so much a series of studies as a series of impressions. I have not mastered the history and literature of the Renaissance (first-hand or second-hand, perfectly or imperfectly), abstract and exact, and then sought out the places and things which could make that abstraction somewhat more concrete in my mind ; I have seen the concrete things, and what I might call the concrete realities of thought and feeling left behind by the Renaissance, and then tried to obtain from books some notion of the original shape and manner of wearing these relics, rags and tatters of a past civilization.

For Italy, beggared and maimed (by her own unthrift, by the rapacity of others, by the order of Fate) at the beginning of the sixteenth century, was never able to weave for herself a new, a modern civilization, as did the nations who had shattered her looms on which such woofs are made, and carried off her earnings with which such things may be bought ; and she had, accordingly, to go through life in the old garments,

still half mediæval in shape, which had been fashioned for her during the Renaissance : apparel of the best that could then be made, beautiful and strong in many ways, so beautiful and strong indeed as to impose on people for a good long time, and make French, and Germans, and Spaniards, and English believe (comparing these brilliant tissues with the homespun they were providing for themselves) that it must be all brand new, and of the very latest fashion. But the garments left to Italy by those latest Middle Ages which we call Renaissance, were not eternal : wear and tear, new occupations, and the rough usage of other nations, rent them most sorely ; their utter neglect by the long seventeenth century, their hasty patchings up (with bits of odd stuff and all manner of coloured thread and string, so that a harlequin's jacket could not look queerer) by the happy-go-lucky practicalness of the eighteenth century and the Revolution, reduced them thoroughly to rags ; and with these rags of Renaissance civilization, Italy may still be seen to drape herself. Not perhaps in the great centres, where the garments of modern civilization, economical, unpicturesque, intended to be worn but a short time, have been imported from other countries ; but yet in many places. Yes, you may still see those rags of the Renaissance as plainly as you see the tattered linen fluttering from the twisted iron hooks (made for the display of precious brocades and carpets on pageant days) which still remain in the stained whitewash, the

seams of battered bricks of the solid old escutcheoned palaces ; see them sometimes displayed like the worm-eaten squares of discoloured embroidery which the curiosity dealers take out of their musty oak presses ; and sometimes dragging about mere useless and befouled odds and ends, like the torn shreds which lie among the decaying kitchen refuse, the broken tiles and plaster, the nameless filth and ooze which attracts the flies under every black archway, in every steep bricked lane descending precipitously between the high old houses. Old palaces, almost strongholds, and which are still inhabited by those too poor to pull them down and build some plastered bandbox instead ; poems and prose tales written or told five hundred years ago, edited and re-edited by printers to whom there come no modern poems or prose tales worth editing instead ; half-pagan, mediæval priest lore, believed in by men and women who have not been given anything to believe instead ; easy-going, all-permitting fifteenth century scepticism, not yet replaced by the scientific and socialistic disbelief which is puritanic and iconoclastic ; sly and savage habits of vengeance still doing service among the lower classes instead of the orderly chicanery of modern justice ; —these are the things, and a hundred others besides, concrete and spiritual, things too magnificent, too sordid, too irregular, too nauseous, too beautiful, and, above all, too utterly unpractical and old-fashioned for our times, which I call the rags of the Renaissance,

and with which Italy still ekes out her scanty apparel of modern thoughts and things.

It is living among such things, turn by turn delighted by their beauty and offended by their foulness, that one acquires the habit of spending a part only of one's intellectual and moral life in the present, and the rest in the past. Impressions are not derived from description, and thoughts are not suggested by books. The juxtaposition of concrete objects invites the making of a theory as the jutting out of two branches invites the spinning of a spider's web. You find everywhere your facts without opening a book. The explanation which I have tried to give of the exact manner in which mediæval art was influenced by the remains of antiquity, came like a flash during a rainy morning in the Pisan Campo Santo ; the working out and testing of that explanation in its details was a matter of going from one church or gallery to the other, a reference or two to Vasari for some date or fact being the only necessary reading ; and should any one at this moment ask me for substantiation of that theory, instead of opening books I would take that person to this Sienese Cathedral, and there bid him compare the griffins and arabesques, the delicate figure and foliage ornaments carved in wood and marble by the latter Middle Ages, with the griffins and arabesques, the boldly bossed horsemen, the exquisite fruit garlands of a certain antique altar stone which the builders of the church used as a base to a

pillar, and which must have been a never-ceasing object of study to every draughtsman and stoneworker in Siena.

Nor are such everywhere-scattered facts ready for working into theoretic shape, the most which Italy still affords to make the study of the Renaissance an almost involuntary habit. In certain places where only decay has altered things from what they were four centuries ago, Perugia, Orvieto, S. Gimignano, in the older quarters of Florence, Venice, and Verona, but nowhere I think so much as in this city of Siena (as purely mediæval as the suits of rusted armour which its townsfolk patch up and bury themselves in during their August pageants), we are subjected to receive impressions of the past so startlingly life-like as to get quite interwoven with our impressions of the present ; and from that moment the past must share, in a measure, some of the everyday thoughts which we give to the present. In such a city as this, the sudden withdrawal, by sacristan or beggar-crone, of the curtain from before an altar-piece is many a time much more than the mere displaying of a picture : it is the sudden bringing us face to face with the real life of the Renaissance. We have ourselves, perhaps not an hour before, sauntered through squares and dawdled beneath porticos like those which we see filled with the red-robed and plumed citizens and patricians, the Jews and ruffians whom Pinturicchio's parti-coloured men-at-arms are dispersing to make

room for the followers of Æneas Sylvius ; or clambered up rough lanes, hedged in between oak woods and oliveyards, which we might almost swear were the very ones through which are winding Sodoma's cavalcades of gallantly dressed gentlemen, with their hawks and hounds, and negro jesters and apes and beautiful pages, cantering along on shortnecked little horses with silver bits and scarlet trappings, on the pretence of being the Kings from the East, carrying gold and myrrh to the infant Christ. It seems as if all were astoundingly real, as if, by some magic, we were actually going to mix in the life of the past. But it is in reality but a mere delusion, a deceit like those dioramas which we have all been into as children, and where, by paying your shilling, you were suddenly introduced into an oasis of the desert, or into a recent battle-field: things which surprised us, real palm trunks and Arabian water jars, or real fascines and cannon balls, lying about for us to touch ; roads opening on all sides into this simulated desert, through this simulated battle-field. So also with these seeming realities of Renaissance life. We can touch the things scattered on the foreground, can handle the weapons, the furniture, the books and musical instruments ; we can see, or think we see, most plainly the streets and paths, the faces and movements of that Renaissance world ; but when we try to penetrate into it, we shall find that there is but a slip of solid ground beneath us, that all around us is but canvas and

painted wall, perspectived and lit up by our fancy ; and that when we try to approach to touch one of those seemingly so real men and women, our eyes find only daubs of paint, our hands meet only flat and chilly stucco. Turn we to our books, and seek therein the spell whereby to make this simulacrum real ; and I think the plaster will still remain plaster, the stones still remain stone. Out of the Renaissance, out of the Middle Ages, we must never hope to evoke any spectres which can talk with us and we with them ; nothing of the kind of those dim but familiar ghosts, often grotesque rather than heroic, who come to us from out of the books, the daubed portraits of times nearer our own, and sit opposite us, making us laugh, and also cry, with humdrum stories and humdrum woes so very like our own. No ; such ghosts the Renaissance has not left behind it. From out of it there come to us no familiars. They are all faces—those which meet us in the pages of chronicles and in the frames of pictures : they are painted records of the past—we may understand them by scanning well their features, but they cannot understand, they cannot perceive us. Such, when all is said, are my impressions of the Renaissance. The moral atmosphere of those days is as impossible for us to breathe as would be the physical atmosphere of the moon : could we, for a moment, penetrate into it, we should die of asphyxia. Say what we may against both Protestant reformation and Catholic reaction, these two began to make an atmo-

sphere (pure or foul) different from that of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, an atmosphere in which lived creatures like ourselves, into which ourselves might penetrate.

A crotchet this, perhaps, of my own ; but it is my feeling, nevertheless. The Renaissance is, I say again, no period out of which we must try and evoke ghostly companions. Let us not waste our strength in seeking to do so ; but be satisfied if it teaches us strange truths, scientific and practical ; if its brilliant and solemn personalities, its bright and majestic art can give us pleasure ; if its evils and wrongs, its inevitable degradation, can move us to pity and to indignation.

SIENA,

*September, 1832.*



THE SACRIFICE.



## THE SACRIFICE.



*Ihr führt ins Leben uns hinein;  
Ihr lässt den armen schuldig werden;  
Dann übergiebt Ihr ihn der Pein,  
Denn alle Schuld rächt sich auf Erden.*

AT the end of the fifteenth century, Italy was the centre of European civilization : while the other nations were still plunged in a feudal barbarism which seems almost as far removed from all our sympathies as is the condition of some American or Polynesian savages, the Italians appear to us as possessing habits of thought, a mode of life, political, social, and literary institutions, not unlike those of to-day ; as men whom we can thoroughly understand, whose ideas and aims, whose general views, resemble our own in that main, indefinable characteristic of being modern. They had shaken off the morbid monastic ways of feeling, they had thrown aside the crooked scholastic modes of thinking, they had trampled under foot the feudal institutions of the Middle Ages ; no symbolical mists made them see things vague, strange, and distorted ; their intellectual atmosphere was as clear as

our own, and, if they saw less than we do, what they did see appeared to them in its true shape and proportions. Almost for the first time since the ruin of antique civilization, they could show well-organized, well-defined States; artistically disciplined armies; rationally devised laws; scientifically conducted agriculture; and widely extended, intelligently undertaken commerce. For the first time, also, they showed regularly built, healthy, and commodious towns; well-drained fields; and, more important than all, hundreds of miles of country owned not by feudal lords, but by citizens; cultivated not by serfs, but by free peasants. While in the rest of Europe men were floundering among the stagnant ideas and crumbling institutions of the effete Middle Ages, with but a vague half-consciousness of their own nature, the Italians walked calmly through a life as well arranged as their great towns, bold, inquisitive, and sceptical: modern administrators, modern soldiers, modern politicians, modern financiers, scholars, and thinkers. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, Italy seemed to have obtained the philosophic, literary, and artistic inheritance of Greece; the administrative, legal, and military inheritance of Rome, increased threefold by her own strong, original, essentially modern activities.

Yet, at that very time, and almost in proportion as all these advantages developed, the moral vitality of the Italians was rapidly decreasing, and a horrible moral gangrene beginning to spread: liberty was

extinguished ; public good faith seemed to be dying out ; even private morality flickered ominously ; every free State became subject to a despot, always unscrupulous and often infamous ; warfare became a mere pretext for the rapine and extortions of mercenaries ; diplomacy grew to be a mere swindle ; the humanists inoculated literature with the filthiest refuse cast up by antiquity ; nay, even civic and family ties were loosened ; assassinations and fratricides began to abound, and all law, human and divine, to be set at defiance.

The nations who came into contact with the Italians opened their eyes with astonishment, with mingled admiration and terror ; and we, people of the nineteenth century, are filled with the same feeling, only much stronger and more defined, as we watch the strange ebullition of the Renaissance, seething with good and evil, as we contemplate the enigmatic picture drawn by the puzzled historian, the picture of a people moving on towards civilization and towards chaos. Our first feeling is perplexity ; our second feeling, anger ; we do not at first know whether we ought to believe in such an anomaly ; when once we do believe in it, we are indignant at its existence. We accuse these Italians of the Renaissance of having wilfully and shamefully perverted their own powers, of having wantonly corrupted their own civilization, of having cynically destroyed their own national existence, of having boldly called down the vengeance of

Heaven ; we lament and we accuse, naturally enough, but perhaps not justly.

Let us ask ourselves what the Renaissance really was, and what was its use ; how it was produced, and how it necessarily ended. Let us try to understand its inherent nature, and the nature of what surrounded it, which, taken together, constitute its inevitable fate ; let us seek the explanation of that strange, anomalous civilization, of that life in death, and death in life.

The Renaissance, inasmuch as it is something which we can define, and not a mere vague name for a certain epoch, is not a period, but a condition ; and if we apply the word to any period in particular, it is because in it that condition was peculiarly marked. The Renaissance may be defined as being that phase in mediæval history in which the double influence, feudal and ecclesiastic, which had gradually crushed the spontaneous life of the early mediæval revival, and reduced all to a dead, sterile mass, was neutralized by the existence of democratic and secular communities ; that phase in which, while there existed not yet any large nations, or any definite national feeling, there existed free towns and civic democracies. In this sense the Renaissance began to exist with the earliest mediæval revival, but its peculiar mission could be carried out only when that general revival had come to an end. In this sense, also, the Renaissance did not exist all over Italy, and it existed outside Italy ; but in Italy it was far more universal than elsewhere :

there it was the rule, elsewhere the exception. There was no Renaissance in Savoy, nor in Naples, nor even in Rome ; but north of the Alps there was Renaissance only in individual towns like Nürnberg, Augsburg, Bruges, Ghent, &c. In the North the Renaissance is dotted about amidst the stagnant Middle Ages ; in Italy the Middle Ages intersect and interrupt the Renaissance here and there : the consequence was that in the North the Renaissance was crushed by the Middle Ages, whereas in Italy the Middle Ages were crushed by the Renaissance. Wherever there was a free town, without direct dependence on feudal or ecclesiastical institutions, governed by its own citizens, subsisting by its own industry and commerce ; wherever the burghers built walls, slung chains across their streets, and raised their own cathedral ; wherever, be it in Germany, in Flanders, or in England, there was a suspension of the deadly influences of the later Middle Ages ; there, to greater or less extent, was the Renaissance.

But in the North this rudimentary Renaissance was never suffered to spread beyond the walls of single towns ; it was hemmed in on all sides by feudal and ecclesiastical institutions, which restrained it within definite limits. The free towns of Germany were mostly dependent upon their bishops or archbishops ; the more politically important cities of Flanders were under the suzerainty of a feudal family ; they were subject to constant vexations from their suzerains,

and their very existence was endangered by an attempt at independence; Liège was well-nigh destroyed by the supporters of her bishop, and Ghent was ruined by the revenge of the Duke of Burgundy. In these northern cities, therefore, the commonwealth was restricted to a sort of mercantile corporation, powerful within the town, but powerless without it; while outside the town reigned feudalism, with its robber nobles, free companies, and bands of outlawed peasants, from whom the merchant princes of Bruges and Nürnberg could scarcely protect their wares. To this political feebleness and narrowness corresponded an intellectual weakness and pettiness: the burghers were mere self-ruling tradesfolk; their interests did not extend far beyond their shops and their houses; literature was cramped in guilds, and reflection and imagination were confined within the narrow limits of town life. Everything was on a small scale; the Renaissance was moderate and inefficient, running no great dangers and achieving no great conquests. There was not enough action to produce reaction; and, while the Italian free States were ground down by foreign tyrannies, the German and Flemish cities insensibly merged into the vast empire of the House of Austria. While also the Italians of the sixteenth century rushed into moral and religious confusion, which only Jesuitism could discipline, the Germans of the same time quietly and comfortably adopted the Reformation.

The main cause of this difference, the main explanation of the fact that while in the North the Renaissance was cramped and enfeebled, in Italy it carried everything before it, lies in the circumstance that feudalism never took deep root in Italy. The conquered Latin race was enfeebled, it is true, but it was far more civilized than the conquering Teutonic peoples; the Barbarians came down, not on to a previous layer of Barbarians, but on to a deep layer of civilized men; the nomads of the North found in Italy a people weakened and corrupt, but with a long and inextinguishable habit of independence, of order, of industry. The country had been cultivated for centuries, the Barbarians could not turn it into a desert; the inhabitants had been organized as citizens for a thousand years, the Barbarians could not reorganize them feudally. The Barbarians who settled in Italy, especially the latest of them, the Lombards, were not only in a minority, but at an immense disadvantage. They founded kingdoms and dukedoms, where German was spoken and German laws were enacted; but whenever they tried to communicate with their Italian subjects, they found themselves forced to adopt the Latin language, manners, and laws; their domination became real only in proportion as it ceased to be Teutonic, and the Barbarian element was swallowed up by what remained of Roman civilization. Little by little these Lombard monarchies, without roots in the soil, and surrounded by hostile influences, died out, and there

remained of the invaders only a certain number of nobles, those whose descendants were to bear the originally German names of Gherardesca, Rolandinghi, Soffredinghi, Lambertazzi, Guidi, and whose suzerains were the Bavarian and Swabian dukes and marquises of Tuscany. Meanwhile the Latin element revived ; towns were rebuilt ; a new Latin language was formed ; and the burghers of these young communities gradually wrested franchises and privileges from the weak Teutonic rulers, who required Italian agriculture, industry, and commerce, without which they and their feudal retainers would have starved. Feudalism became speedily limited to the hilly country ; the plain became the property of the cities which it surrounded ; the nobles turned into mere robber chieftains, then into mercenary soldiers, and finally, as the towns gained importance, they gradually descended into the cities and begged admission into the guilds of artizans and tradesfolk. Thus they grew into citizens and Italians ; but for a long time they kept hankering after feudalism, and looking towards the German emperors who claimed the inheritance of the Lombard kings. The struggle between Guelphs and Ghibellines, between the German feudal element and the Latin civic one, ended in the complete annihilation of the former in all the north and centre of Italy. The nobles sank definitely into merchants, and those who persisted in keeping their castles were speedily ousted by the commissaries of the free towns. Such is the history

of feudalism in Italy—the history of Barbarian minority engulfed in Latin civilization ; of Teutonic counts and dukes turned into robber nobles, hunted into the hills by the townsfolk, and finally seeking admission into the guilds of wool-spinners or money-changers ; and in it is the main explanation of the fact that the Italian republics, instead of remaining restricted within their city walls like those of the North, spread over whole provinces, and became real politically organized States. And in such States having a free political, military, and commercial life, uncramped by ecclesiastic or feudal influence, in them alone could the great revival of human intelligence and character thoroughly succeed. The commune was the only species of free government possible during the Middle Ages, the only form which could resist that utterly prostrating action of later mediævalism. Feudalism stamped out civilization ; monasticism warped it ; in the open country it was burnt, trampled on, and uprooted ; in the cloister it withered and shrank and perished ; only within the walls of a city, protected from the storm without, and yet in the fresh atmosphere of life, could it develope, flourish, and bear fruit.

But this system of the free town contained in itself, as does every other institution, the seed of death—contained it in that expanding element which develope, ripens, rots, and finally dissolves all living organisms. A little town is formed in the midst of some feudal state, as Pisa, Florence, Lucca, and Bologna were

formed in the dominions of the lords of Tuscany ; the *elders* govern it ; it is protected from without ; it obtains privileges from its suzerain, always glad to oppose anything to his vassals, and who, unlike them, is too far removed in the feudal scale to injure the commune, which is under his supreme jurisdiction but not in his land. The town can thus develop regularly, governing itself, taxing itself, defending itself against encroaching neighbours ; it gradually extends beyond its own walls, liberates its peasantry, extends its commerce, extinguishes feudalism, beats back its suzerain or buys privileges from him ; in short, lives the vigorous young life of the early Italian commonwealths. But now the danger begins. The original system of government, where every head of a family is a power in the State, where every man helps to govern, without representation or substitution, could exist only as long as the commune remained small enough for the individual to be in proportion with it ; as long as the State remained small enough for all its citizens to assemble in the market-place and vote, for every man to know every detail of the administration, every inch of the land. When the limits were extended, the burgher had to deal with towns and villages and men and things which he did not know, and which he probably hated, as every small community hated its neighbour ; witness the horrible war, lasting centuries, between the two little towns of Dinant and Bouvines on the Meuse. Still more was

this the case with an important city : the subjugated town was hated all the more for being a rival centre ; the burghers of Florence, inspired only by their narrow town interest, treated Pisa according to its dictates, that is, tried to stamp it out. Thence the victorious communes came to be surrounded by conquered communes, which they dared not trust with any degree of power ; and which, instead of being so many allies in case of invasion, were merely focuses of revolt, or at best inert impediments. Similarly, when the communes enlarged, and found it indispensable to delegate special men, who could attend to political matters more thoroughly than the other citizens, they were constantly falling under the tyranny of their *captains of the people*, of their *gonfalonieri*, and of all other heads of the State ; or else, as in Florence, they were frightened by this continual danger into a system of perpetual interference with the executive, which was thus rendered well-nigh helpless. To this rule Venice forms the only exception, on account of her exceptional position and history : the earliest burghers turning into an intensely conservative and civic aristocracy, while everywhere else the feudal nobles turned into petty burghers, entirely subversive of communal interests. Venice had the yet greater safeguard of being protected both from her victorious enemies and her own victorious generals ; who, however powerful on the mainland, could not seriously endanger the city itself, which thus remained a centre of reorganization in time of disaster. In this

Venice was entirely unique, as she was unique in the duration of her institutions and independence. In the other towns of Italy, where there existed no naturally governing family or class, where every citizen had an equal share in government, and there existed no distinction save that of wealth and influence, there was a constant tendency to the illegitimate preponderance of every man or every family that rose above the average ; and in a democratic, mercantile State, not a day passed without some such elevation. In a systematic, consolidated State, where the power is in the hands of a hereditary sovereign or aristocracy, a rich merchant remains a rich merchant, a victorious general remains a victorious general, an eloquent orator remains an eloquent orator ; but in a shapeless, fluctuating democracy like those of Italy, the man who has influence over his fellow-citizens, whether by his money, his soldiers, or his eloquence, necessarily becomes the head of the State ; everything is free and unoccupied, only a little superior strength is required to push into it. Cosimo de' Medici has many clients, many correspondents, many debtors ; he can bind people by pecuniary obligations: he becomes prince. Sforza has a victorious army, whom he can either hound on to the city or restrain into a protection of its interests: he becomes prince. Savonarola has eloquence that makes the virtuous start up and the wicked tremble: he becomes prince. The history of the Italian commonwealths shows us but one thing: the people, the

only legal possessors of political power, giving it over to their bankers (Medici, Pepoli); to their generals (Della Torre, Visconti, Scaligeri); to their monkish reformers (Fra Bussolaro, Fra Giovanni da Vincenza, Savonarola). Here then we have the occasional but inevitable usurpers, who either momentarily or finally disorganize the State. But this is not all. In such a State every family hate, every mercantile hostility, means a corresponding political division. The guilds are sure to be rivals, the larger wishing to exclude the smaller from government: the lower working classes (the *ciompi* of Florence) wish to upset the guilds completely; the once feudal nobles wish to get back military power; the burghers wish entirely to extirpate the feudal nobles; the older families wish to limit the Government, the newer prefer democracy and Cæsarism. Add to this the complications of private interests, the personal jealousies and aversions, the private warfare, inevitable in a town where legal justice is not always to be had, while forcible retaliation is always within reach; and the result is constant party spirit, insults, scuffles, conspiracies: the feudal nobles build towers in the streets, the burghers pull them down; the lower artisans set fire to the warehouses of the guilds, the magistrates take part in the contest; blood is spilt, magistrates are beheaded or thrown out of windows, a foreign State is entreated to interfere, and a number of citizens are banished by the victorious party. This latter result creates a new and terrible danger for the

State, in the persons of so many exiles, ready to do anything, to join with any one, in order to return to the city and drive out their enemies in their turn. The end of such constant upheavings is that the whole population is disarmed, no party suffering its rival to have any means of offence or defence. Moreover, as industry and commerce develope, the citizens become unwilling to fight, while on the other hand the invention of firearms, subverting the whole system of warfare, renders special military training more and more necessary. In the days of the Lombard League, of Campaldino and Montaperti, the citizens could fight, hand to hand, round their *carroccio* or banner, without much discipline being required ; but when it came to fortifying towns against cannon, to drilling bodies of heavily armed cavalry, acting by the mere dexterity of their movements ; when war became a science and an art, then the citizen had necessarily to be left out, and adventurers and poor nobles had to form armies of mercenaries, making warfare their sole profession. This system of mercenary troops, so bitterly inveighed against by Machiavelli (who, of course, entirely overlooked its inevitable origin and viewed it as a voluntarily incurred pest), added yet another and, perhaps, the very worst danger to civil liberty. It gave enormous, irresistible power to adventurers unscrupulous by nature and lawless by education, the sole object of whose career it became to obtain possession of States ; by no means a difficult enterprise, considering that

they and their fellows were the sole possessors of military force in the country. At the same time, this system of mercenaries perfected the condition of utter defencelessness in which the gradual subjection of rival cities, the violent party spirit, and the general disarming of the burghers, had placed the great Italian cities. For these troops, being wholly indifferent as to the cause for which they were fighting, turned war into the merest game of dodges—half-a-dozen men being killed at a great battle like that of Anghiari—and they at the same time protracted campaigns beyond every limit, without any decisive action taking place. The result of all these inevitable causes of ruin, was that most of the commonwealths fell into the hands of despots; while those that did not were paralyzed by interior factions, by a number of rebellious subject towns, and by generals who, even if they did not absolutely betray their employers, never efficiently served them.

Such a condition of civic disorder lasted throughout the Middle Ages, until the end of the fifteenth century, without any further evils arising from it. The Italians made endless wars with each other, conquered each other, changed their government without end, fell into the power of tyrants; but throughout these changes their civilization developed unimpeded; because, although one of the centres of national life might be momentarily crushed, the others remained in activity, and infused vitality even into

the feeble one, which would otherwise have perished. All these ups and downs seemed but to stir the life in the country: and no vital danger appeared to threaten it; nor did any, so long as the surrounding countries—France, Germany, and Spain—remained mere vast feudal nebulæ, formless, weightless, immovable. The Italians feared nothing from them; they would call down the King of France or the Emperor of Germany without a moment's hesitation, because they knew that the king could not bring France, nor the emperor bring Germany, but only a few miserable, hungry retainers with him; but Florence would watch the growth of the petty State of the Scaligers, and Venice look with terror at the Duke of Milan, because they knew that *there* there was concentrated life, and an organization which could be wielded as perfectly as a sword by the head of the State. In the last decade of the fifteenth century the Italians called in the French to put down their private enemies: Lodovico of Milan called down Charles VIII. to rid him of his nephew and of the Venetians; the Venetians to rid them of Lodovico: the Medici to establish them firmly in Florence; the party of freedom to drive out the Medici. Each State intended to use the French to serve their purpose, and then to send back Charles VIII. with a little money and a great deal of derision, as they had done with kings and emperors of earlier days. But Italian politicians suddenly discovered that they had made a

fatal mistake ; that they had reckoned in ignorance, and that instead of an army they had called down a nation : for during the interval since their last appeal to foreign interference, that great movement had taken place which had consolidated the heterogeneous feudal nebulæ into homogeneous and compact kingdoms.

Single small States, relying upon mercenary troops, could not for a moment resist the shock of such an agglomeration of soldiery as that of the French, and of their successors the Spaniards and Germans. Sismondi asks indignantly, Why did the Italians not form a federation as soon as the strangers appeared ? He might as well ask, Why did the commonwealths not turn into a modern monarchy ? The habit of security from abroad and of jealousy within ; the essential nature of a number of rival trading centres, made such a thing not only impossible of execution, but for a while impossible of conception ; confederacies had become possible only when Burlamacchi was decapitated by the imperialists ; popular resistance had become a reality only when Feruccio was massacred by the Spaniards ; a change of national institutions was feasible only when all national institutions had been destroyed ; when the Italians, having recognized the irresistible force of their adversaries, had ceased to form independent States and larger and smaller guilds ; when all the characteristics of Italian civilization had been destroyed ; when, in short, it was

too late to do anything save theorize with Machiavelli and Guicciardini as to what ought to have been done. We must not hastily accuse the volition of the Italians of the Renaissance ; they may have been egotistic and timid, but had they been (as some most certainly were) heroic and self-sacrificing to the utmost degree, they could not have averted the catastrophe. The nature of their civilization prevented not only their averting the peril, but even their conceiving its existence ; the very nature of their political forms necessitated such a dissolution of them. The commune grows from within ; it is a little speck which gradually extends its circumference, and the further this may be from the original centre, the less do its parts coalesce. The modern monarchy grows from external pressure, and towards the centre ; it is a huge mass consolidating into a hard, distinct shape. Thence it follows that the more the commonwealth develops, the weaker it grows, because its tendency is to spread and fall to pieces ; whereas the more the monarchy develops, the stronger it becomes, because it fills up towards the centre, and becomes more vigorously knit together. The city ceases to be a city when extended over hundreds of miles ; the nation becomes all the more a nation for being compressed towards a central point.

The entire political collapse of Italy in the sixteenth century was not only inevitable, from the essential nature of the civilization of the Renaissance, but it

was also indispensable in order that this civilization might fulfil its mission. Civilization cannot spread so long as it is contained within a national mould, and only a vanquished nation can civilize its victors. The Greece of Pericles could not Hellenize Rome, but the Greece of the weak successors of Alexander could ; the Rome of Cæsar did not Romanize the Teutonic races as did the Rome of Theodosius ; no amount of colonizing among the vanquished can ever produce the effect of a victorious army, of a whole nation, suddenly finding itself in the midst of the superior civilization of a conquered people. Michelet may well call the campaign of Charles VIII. the discovery of Italy. His imaginative mind seized at once the vast importance of this descent of the French into Italy, which other historians have been too prone to view in the same light as any other invasion. It is from this moment that dates the *modernization*, if we may so express ourselves, of the North. The barbarous soldiers of Gaston de Foix, of Frundsberg, and of Gonsalvo, were the unconscious bearers of the seeds of the ages of Elizabeth, of Louis XIV., and of Goethe. These stupid and rapacious ruffians, while they wantonly destroyed the works of Italian civilization, rendered possible the existence of a Montaigne, a Shakespeare, and a Cervantes.

Italy was as a vast storehouse, sheltered from all the dangers of mediæval destruction ; in which, while all other nations were blindly and fiercely working out

their national existence, the inheritance of Antiquity and the produce of the earliest modern civilization had been peaceably garnered up. When the storehouse was full, its gates had to be torn open and its riches plundered and disseminated by the intellectual starvelings of the North ; thus only could the rest of mankind feed on these riches, regain and develop their mental life.

What were those intellectual riches of the Renaissance ? What was that strong intellectual food which revived the energies and enriched the blood of the Barbarians of the sixteenth century ? The Renaissance possessed the germs of every modern thing, and much that was far more than a mere germ : it possessed the habit of equality before the law, of civic organization, of industry and commerce developed to immense and superb proportions. It possessed science, literature, and art ; above all, that which at once produced and was produced by all these—thorough perception of what exists, thorough consciousness of our own freedom and powers : self-cognizance. In Italy there was intellectual light, enabling men to see and judge all around them, enabling them to act wittingly and deliberately. In this lies the immense greatness of the Renaissance ; to this are due all its achievements in literature and science, and, above all, in art : that, for the first time since the dissolution of antique civilization, men were free agents, both in thought and in deed ; that there was an end of that

palsying slavery of the Middle Ages, slavery of body and of mind, slavery to stultified ideas and effete forms, which made men endure every degree of evil and believe every degree of absurdity. For the first time since Antiquity, man walks free of all political and intellectual trammels, erect, conscious of his own thoughts, master of his own actions ; ready to seek for truth across the ocean like Columbus, or across the heavens like Copernicus ; to seek it in criticism and analysis like Machiavelli or Guicciardini, boldly to reproduce it in its highest, widest sense like Michael Angelo and Raphael.

The men of the Renaissance had to pay a heavy price for this intellectual freedom and self-cognizance which they not only enjoyed themselves, but transmitted to the rest of the world ; the price was the loss of all moral standard, of all fixed public feeling. They had thrown aside all accepted rules and criteria, they had cast away all faith in traditional institutions, they had destroyed, and could not yet rebuild. In their instinctive and universal disbelief in all that had been taught them, they lost all respect for opinion, for rule, for what had been called right and wrong. Could it be otherwise ? Had they not discovered that what had been called right had often been unnatural, and what had been called wrong often natural ? Moral teachings, remonstrances, and judgments belonged to that dogmatism from which they had broken loose ; to those schools and churches where the foolish and

the unnatural had been taught and worshipped ; to those priests and monks who themselves most shamefully violated their teachings. To profess morality was to be a hypocrite ; to reprobate others was to be narrow-minded. There was so much error mixed up with truth that truth had to share the discredit of error ; so many innocent things had been denounced as sins that sinful ones at length ceased to be reprobated ; people had so often found themselves sympathizing with supposed criminals, that they soon lost their horror of real ones. Damnation came to be disassociated from moral indignation : it was the retribution, not of the unnatural and immoral, but of the unlawful ; and unlawful with respect to a law made without reference to reason and instinct. As reason and instinct were thus set at defiance, but could not be silenced, the law was soon acquiesced in without being morally supported ; thus, little by little, moral feeling became warped. This was already the case in Dante's day. Farinata is condemned to the most horrible punishment, which to Dante seems just, because in accordance with an accepted code ; yet Dante cannot but admire him and cannot really hate him, for there is nothing in him to hate ; he is a criminal and yet respected—fatal combination ! Dante punishes Francesca, Pier delle Vigne, and Brunetto Latini, but he shows no personal horror of them ; in the one case his moral instinct refrains from censuring the comparatively innocent, in the other it has ceased to

revolt from the really infamous. Where Dante does feel real indignation, is most often in cases unprovided for by the religious codes, as with those low, grovelling, timid natures (the very same with whom Machiavelli, the admirer of great villains, fairly loses patience), those creatures whom Dante personally despises, whom he punishes with filthy devices of his own, whom he passes by with words such as he never addresses to Semiramis, Brutus, or Capaneus. This toleration of vice, while acquiescing in its legal punishment, increased in proportion to the development of individual judgment, and did not cease till all the theories of the lawful and unlawful had been so completely demolished as to permit of their being rebuilt on solid bases.

This work of demolition had not yet ceased in the beginning of the sixteenth century; and the moral confusion due to it was increased by various causes dependent on political and other circumstances. The despots in whose hands it was the inevitable fate of the various commonwealths to fall, were by their very position immoral in all their dealings: violent, fraudulent, suspicious, and, from their life of constant unnatural tension of the feelings, prone to every species of depravity; while, on the other hand, in the feudal parts of Italy—which had merely received a superficial Renaissance varnish imported from other places with painters and humanists—in Naples, Rome, and the greater part of Umbria and the Marches, the upper

classes had got into that monstrous condition which seems to have been the inevitable final product of feudalism, and which, while it gave France her Armagnacs, her Foix, and her Retz, gave Italy their counterparts in her hideously depraved princelets, the Malatestas, Varanos, Vitelli, and Baglioni. Both these classes of men, despots and feudal nobles, had a wide field for their ambition among the necessarily dissolved civic institutions; and their easy success contributed to confirm the general tendency of the day to say with Commines, "Qui a le succès a l'honneur," and to confound these two words and ideas. Nor was this yet all: the men of the Renaissance discovered the antique world, and in their wild, blind enthusiasm, in their ardent, insatiable thirst for its literature, swallowed it eagerly, dregs and all, till they were drunk and poisoned.

These are the main causes of the immorality of the Renaissance: first, the general disbelief in all accepted doctrines, due to the falseness and unnaturalness of those hitherto prevalent; secondly, the success of unscrupulous talent in a condition of political disorder; thirdly, the wholesale and unjudging enthusiasm for all that remained of Antiquity, good or bad. These three great causes, united in a general intellectual ebullition, are the explanation of the worst feature of the Renaissance: not the wickedness of numberless single individuals, but the universal toleration of it by the people at large. Men like Sigismondo Malatesta,

Sixtus IV., Alexander VI., and Cæsar Borgia might be passed over as exceptions, as monstrous aberrations which cannot affect our judgment of their time and nation; but the general indifference towards their vices shown by their contemporaries and countrymen is a conclusive and terrible proof of the moral chaos of the Renaissance. It is just the presence of so much instinctive simplicity and virtue, of childlike devotion to great objects, of patriarchal simplicity of manners, of all that is loveable in the books of men like *Vespasiano da Bisticci* and *Leon Battista Alberti*; of so much that seems like the realization of the idyllic home and merchant life of Schiller's "Song of the Bell," by the side of all the hideous lawlessness and vice of the despots and humanists; that makes the Renaissance so drearily painful a spectacle. The presence of the good does not console us for that of the evil, because it neither mitigates nor even shrinks from it; we merely lose our pleasure in the good nature and simplicity of *Æneas Sylvius* when we see his cool admiration for a man of fraud and violence like *Sforza*; we begin to mistrust the purity and integrity of the upright *Guarino da Verona* when we hear his lenient judgment of the infamous *Beccadelli*; we require of the virtuous that they should not only be incapable of vice, but abhorrent of it; and this is what even the best men of the Renaissance rarely were.

Such a state of moral chaos there has constantly

been when an old effete mode of thought required to be destroyed. Such work is always attended, in greater or less degree, by this subversion of all recognized authority, this indifference to evil, this bold tasting of the forbidden. In the eighteenth century France plays the same part that was played in the fifteenth by Italy : again we meet the rebellion against all that has been consecrated by time and belief, the toleration of evil, the praise of the abominable, in the midst of the search for the good. These two have been the great fever epochs of modern history ; fever necessary for a subsequent steady growth. Both gave back truth to man, and man to nature, at the expense of temporary moral uncertainty and ruthless destruction. The Renaissance reinstated the individual in his human dignity, as a thinking, feeling, and acting being ; the Eighteenth Century reconstructed society as a homogeneous free existence ; both at the expense of individual degradation and social disorder. Both were moments of ebullition in which horrible things rose to the surface, but after which what remained was purer than it had ever been before.

This is no plea for the immorality of the Renaissance : evil is none the less evil for being inevitable and necessary ; but it is nevertheless well that we should understand its necessity. It certainly is a terrible admission, but one which must be made, that evil is part of the mechanism for producing good ; and had the arrangement of the universe been entrusted

to us, benevolent and equitable people of an enlightened age, there would doubtless have been invented some system of evolution and progression differing from the one which includes such machinery as hurricanes and pestilences, carnage and misery, superstition and license, Renaissance and Eighteenth Century. But unfortunately Nature was organized in a less charitable and intelligent fashion ; and, among other evils required for the final attainment of good, we find that of whole generations of men being condemned to moral uncertainty and error in order that other generations may enjoy knowledge peacefully and guiltlessly. Let us remember this, and let us be more generous towards the men who were wicked that we might be enlightened. Above all, let us bear in mind, in judging the Renaissance, that the sacrifice which it represents could be useful only in so far as it was complete and irretrievable. Let us remember that the communal system of government, on whose development the Renaissance mainly depended, inevitably perished in proportion as it developed ; that the absolute subjugation of Italy by Barbarous nations was requisite to the dissemination of the civilization thus obtained ; that the Italians were politically annihilated before they had time to recover a normal condition, and were given up crushed and broken-spirited, to be taught righteousness by Spaniards and Jesuits. That, in short, while the morality of the Italians was sacrificed to obtain the knowledge on

which modern society depends, the political existence of Italy was sacrificed to the diffusion of that knowledge, and that the nation was not only doomed to immorality, but doomed also to the inability to reform. Perhaps, if we think of all this, and weigh the tremendous sacrifice to which we owe our present intellectual advantages, we may still feel sad, but sad rather with remorse than with indignation, in contemplating the condition of Italy in the first years of the sixteenth century; in looking down from our calm, safe, scientific position, on the murder of the Italian Renaissance: great and noble at heart, cut off pitilessly at its prime; denied even an hour to repent and amend; hurried off before the tribunal of posterity, suddenly, unexpectedly, and still bearing its weight of unexpiated, unrecognized guilt.

THE ITALY OF THE ELIZABETHAN  
DRAMATISTS.



## THE ITALY OF THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMATISTS.



THE chroniclers of the last years of the fifteenth century have recorded how the soldiery of Charles VIII. of France amused the tedious leisure of their sullen and suspicious occupation of Rome, by erecting in the camp a stage of planks, and performing thereon a rude mystery-play. The play thus improvised by a handful of troopers before this motley invading army : before the feudal cavalry of Burgundy, strange steel monsters, half bird, half reptile, with steel beaked and winged helmets and claw-like steel shoes, and jointed steel corselet and rustling steel mail coat ; before the infantry of Gascony, rapid and rapacious with tattered doublets and rag-bound feet ; before the over-fed, immensely plumed, and slashed and furbelowed giants of Switzerland, and the starved, half-naked savages of Brittany and the Marches ; before

this multifaced, many-speeched army, gathered from the rich cities of the North and the devastated fields of the South, and the wilds and rocks of the West and the East, alike in nothing save in its wonder and dread and delight and horror at this strange invaded Italy—the play performed for the entertainment of this encamped army was no ordinary play. No clerkly allegorical morality; no mouthing and capering market-place farce; no history of Joseph and his Brethren, of the Birth of the Saviour, or of the Temptation of St. Anthony. It was the half-allegorical, half-dramatic representation of the reigning Pope Borgia and his children; it was the rude and hesitating moulding into dramatic shape of those terrible rumours of simony and poison, of lust and of violence, of mysterious death and abominable love, which had met the invaders as they had first set their feet in Italy; which had become louder and clearer with every onward step through the peninsula, and now circulated around them, with frightful distinctness, in the very capital of Christ's Vicar on Earth. This blundering mystery-play of the French troopers is the earliest imaginative fruit of that first terrified and fascinated glimpse of the men of the barbarous North at the strange Italy of the Renaissance; it is the first manifestation of that strong tragic impulse due to the sudden sight, by rude and imaginative young nations, of the splendid and triumphant wickedness of Italy.

The French saw, wondered, shuddered, and played upon their camp stage the tragedy of the Borgias. But the French remained in Italy, became familiar with its ways, and soon merely shrugged their shoulders and smiled where they had once stared in horror. They served under the flags of Sforzas, Borgias, Baglionis, and Vitellis, by the side of the bravos of Naples and Umbria ; they saw their princes wed the daughters of evil-famed Italian sovereigns, and their princes' children, their own Valois and Guises, develop into puny, ambiguous, and ominous Medicis and Gonzagas, surrounded by Italian minions and poison distillers, and buffoons and money-lenders. The French of the sixteenth century, during their long Neapolitan and Lombard wars and negotiations, had time to learn all that Italy could teach ; to become refined, subtle, indifferent, and cynical : bastard Italians, with the bastard Italian art of Goujon and Philibert Delorme, and the bastard Italian poetry of Du Bellay and Ronsard. The French of the sixteenth century therefore translated Machiavel and Ariosto and Bandello ; but they never again attempted such another play as that which they had improvised while listening to the tales of Alexander VI. and Cæsar and Lucrezia, in their camp in the meadows behind Sant' Angelo. The Spaniards then came to Italy, and the Germans : strong mediæval nations, like the French, with the creative power of the Middle Ages still in them, refreshed by the long

rest of the dull fifteenth century. But Spaniards and Germans came as mere greedy and besotten and savage mercenaries : the scum of their countries, careless of Italian sights and deeds, thinking only of torturing for hidden treasure, or swilling southern wines ; and they returned to Spain and to Germany, to persecutions of Moriscos and plundering of abbeys, as savage and well-nigh as dull as they had arrived. A smattering of Italian literature, art, and manners was carried back to Spain and Germany by Spanish and German princes and governors, to be transmitted to a few courtiers and humanists ; but the imagination of the lower classes of Spain and of Germany, absorbed in the quixotic Catholicism of Loyola and the biblical contemplation of Luther, never came into fertilizing contact with the decaying Italy of the Renaissance.

The mystery-play of the soldiers of Charles VIII. seemed destined to remain an isolated and abortive attempt. But it was not so. The invasions had exhausted themselves ; the political organization of Italy was definitively broken up ; its material wealth was exhausted ; the French, Germans, and Spaniards had come and gone, and returned and gone again ; they had left nothing to annex or to pillage ; when, about the middle of the sixteenth century, the country began to be overrun by a new horde of barbarians : the English. The English came neither as invaders nor as marauders ; they were peaceable students and rich noblemen, who, so far from trying to extort

money or annex territory, rather profited the ruined Italians by the work which they did and the money which they squandered. Yet these quiet and profitable travellers, before whom the Italians might safely display their remaining wealth, were in reality as covetous of the possessions of Italy and as resolute to return home enriched as any tattered Gascon men-at-arms or gluttonous Swiss or grinding Spaniards. They were, one and all, consciously and unconsciously, dragged to Italy by the irresistible instinct that Italy possessed that which they required: by the greed of intellectual gain. That which they thus instinctively knew that Italy possessed, that which they were resolved to obtain, was a mode of thought, a habit of form; philosophy, art, civilization: all the materials for intellectual manipulation. For, in the sixteenth century, on awakening from its long evil sleep, haunted by civil war nightmares of the fifteenth century, the English mind had started up in the vigour of well-nigh mature youth, nourished and rested by the long inactivity in which it had slept through its period of assimilation and growth. It had awakened at the first touch of foreign influence, and had grown with every fresh contact with the outer world: with the first glance at Plato and Xenophon suddenly opened by Erasmus and Colet, at the Bible suddenly opened by Cranmer; it had grown with its sob of indignation at the sight of the burning faggots surrounding the martyrs, with its joyous heart-throbs at the sight of

the seas and islands of the New World ; it had grown with the sudden passionate strain of every nerve and every muscle when the galleys of Philip had been sighted in the Channel. And when it had paused, taken breath, and looked calmly around it, after the tumult of all these sights and sounds and actions, the English mind, in the time of Elizabeth, had found itself of a sudden full-grown and blossomed out into superb manhood, with burning activities and indefatigable powers. But it had found itself without materials for work. Of the scholastic philosophy and the chivalric poetry of the Middle Ages there remained but little that could be utilized : the few bungled formulæ, the few half-obsolete rhymes still remaining, were as unintelligible, in their spirit of feudalism and monasticism and mysticism, as were the Angevin English and the monkish Latin in which they were written to these men of the sixteenth century. All the intellectual wealth of England remained to be created ; but it could not be created out of nothing. Spenser, Shakespeare, and Bacon could not be produced out of the half-effete and scattered fragments of Chaucer, of Scotus, and of Wycliffe. The materials on which English genius was to work must be sought abroad, and abroad they could be found only in Italy. For in the demolished Italy of the sixteenth century lay the whole intellectual wealth of the world : the great legacy of Antiquity, the great work of the Middle Ages had been stored up, and had been increased

threefold, and sorted and classified by the Renaissance ; and now that the national edifice had been dismantled and dilapidated, and the national activity was languishing, it all lay in confusion, awaiting only the hand of those who would carry it away and use it once more. To Italy therefore Englishmen of thought and fancy were dragged by an impulse of adventure and greed as irresistible as that which dragged to Antwerp and the Hanse ports, to India and America, the seekers for gold and for soil. To Italy they flocked and through Italy they rambled, prying greedily into each cranny and mound of the half-broken civilization, upturning with avid curiosity all the rubbish and filth ; seeking with aching eyes and itching fingers for the precious fragments of intellectual splendour ; lingering with fascinated glance over the broken remnants and deep, mysterious gulfs of a crumbling and devastated civilization. And then, impatient of their intoxicating and tantalizing search, suddenly grown desperate, they clutched and stored away everything, and returned home tattered, soiled, bedecked with gold and with tinsel, laden with an immense uncouth burden of jewels, and broken wealth, and refuse and ordure, with pseudo-antique philosophy, with half-mediæval Petrarchesque poetry, with Renaissance science, with humanistic pedantry and obscenity, with euphuistic conceits and casuistic quibble, with art, politics, metaphysics—civilization embedded in all manner

of rubbish and abomination, soiled with all manner of ominous stains. All this did they carry home and throw helter-skelter into the new-kindled fire of English intellectual life, mingling with it many a humble-seeming Northern alloy; cleaning and compounding, casting into shapes, mediæval and English, this strange Corinthian brass made of all these heterogeneous remnants, classical, Italian, Saxon, and Christian. A strange Corinthian brass indeed; and as various in tint, in weight, and in tone, in manifold varieties of mixture, as were the moulds into which it was cast: the white and delicate silver settling down in the gracious poetic moulds of Sidney and Spenser; the glittering gold, which can buy and increase, in the splendid, heavy mould of Bacon's prose; and the copper, the iron, the silver and gold in wondrous mixture, with wondrous iridescences of colour and wondrous scale of tone, all poured into the manifold moulds, fantastic and beautiful and grand, of Shakespeare. And as long as all this dross and ore and filth brought from the ruins of Italy was thus mingling in the heat of English genius, while it was yet but imperfectly fused, while already its purest and best compounded portion was being expended to make Shakespeare, and when already there remained only a seething residue, some of it all, of the pure metal bubbling up, of the scum frothing round, nay, of the very used-up dregs, was ever and anon being

ladled out—gold, dross, filth, all indiscriminately—and cast into shapes severe, graceful, or uncouth. And this somewhat, thus pilfered from what was to make, or was making, or had made, the works of Shakespeare; this base and noble, still unfused or already exhausted alloy, became the strange heterogeneous works of the Elizabethan dramatists; of Webster, of Ford, of Tourneur, of Ben Jonson, of Beaumont and Fletcher, and of their lesser brethren; from the splendid ore of Marlowe, only half molten and half freed from dross, down to the shining metal of Massinger, smooth and silvery as only tinsel can be.

In all the works of our Elizabethans, we see not only the assimilated intellectual wealth of Italy, but we see the deep impression, the indelible picture in the memory, of Italy itself; the positive, unallegorical, essentially secular mode of thought; the unascetic, æsthetic, eminently human mode of feeling; the artistic desire for clear and harmonious form; the innumerable tendencies and habits which sever the Elizabethans so completely from the Middle Ages, and bring them so near at once to ourselves and to the ancients, making them at once antique and modern, in opposition to mediæval; these essential characters and the vast bulk of absolute scientific fact and formula, of philosophic opinion, of artistic shape, of humanistic learning, are only one-half of the debt of our sixteenth century to the Italy of the Renaissance. The delicate form of the Italian sonnet, as copied by Sidney from

Bembo and Molza and Costanzo, contained within it the exotic and exquisite ideal passion of the "Vita Nuova" and Petrarch. With their bright, undulating stanza Spenser received from Ariosto and Tasso the richly coloured spirit of the Italian descriptive epic. With the splendid involutions of Machiavelli's and Guicciardini's prose Bacon learned their cool and disimpassioned philosophy. From the reading of Politian and Lorenzo dei Medici, from the sight of the Psyche of Raphael, the Europa of Veronese, the Ariadne of Tintoret, men like Greene and Dorset learned that revival of a more luscious and pictorial antique which was brought to perfection in Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" and Marlowe's "Sestiad." From the Platonists and Epicureans of Renaissance Italy our greatest dramatists learned that cheerful and serious love of life, that solemn and manly facing of death, that sense of the finiteness of man, the inexhaustibleness of nature, which shines out in such grand paganism, with such Olympian serenity, as of the bent brows and smiling lips of an antique Zeus, in Shakespeare, in Marlowe, in Beaumont and Fletcher, even in the sad and savage Webster. But with the abstract, with the imbibed modes of thought and feeling, with the imitated forms, the Elizabethans brought back from Italy the concrete, the individual, the personal. They filled their works with Italian things : from the whole plot of a play borrowed from an Italian novel, to the mere passing allusion to an

Italian habit, or the mere quotation of an Italian word ; from the full-length picture of the actions of Italian men and women, down to the mere sketch, in two or three words, of a bit of Italian garden or a group of Italian figures ; nay, to the innumerable scraps of tiny detail, grotesque, graceful, or richly coloured, which they stuffed into all their works : allusions to the buffoons of the mask comedy, to the high-voiced singers, to the dress of the Venetian merchants, to the step of a dance ; to the pomegranate in the garden or the cypress on the hillside ; often mere names of Italian things : the *lavolta* and *corranto* dances, the *Traghetto* ferry, the Rialto bridge ; countless little touches, trifling to us, but which brought home to the audience at the Globe or at Blackfriars that wonderful Italy which every man of the day had travelled through at least in spirit, and had loved at least in imagination. And of this wonderful Italy the Englishmen of the days of Elizabeth and of James knew yet another side ; they were familiar, whether travelled or untravelled, with yet other things besides the buffoons and singers and dancers, the scholars and learned ladies, the pomegranates, and cypresses and roses and nightingales ; and fascinated by something besides the green lagoons, the clear summer nights, the soft spring evenings whose fascination we feel in the words of Jessica and Portia and Juliet. The English knew and were haunted by the crimes of Italy : the terrible and brilliant, the mysterious and

shadowy crimes of lust and of blood which, in their most gigantic union and monstrous enthronement on the throne of the vicar of Christ, had in the first terrified glimpse, awakened the tragic impulse in the soldiers of Charles VIII.

We can picture to ourselves the innumerable English travellers who went to Italy greedy for life and knowledge or merely obeying a fashion of the day—travellers forced into far closer contact with the natives than the men of the time of Walpole and of Beckford, who were met by French-speaking hosts and lacqueys and officials—travellers also thirsting to imbibe the very spirit of the country as the travellers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries never thirsted; and their morbid passion for the stories of abominable and unpunished crime—crime of the learned, the refined, the splendid parts of society—which permeated the Italy of the deeply corrupted sixteenth century. We can imagine how the prosaic merchants' clerks from London; the perfumed dandies, trying on Italian clothes, rehearsing Italian steps and collecting Italian oaths, the Faulconbridges of Shakespeare and Mr. Gingleboys of Beaumont and Fletcher, sent to Italy in order gracefully to

Kiss the hand and cry, "sweet lady!"  
Say they had been at Rome and seen the relics,  
Drunk your Verdea wine, and rid at Naples—

how all these privileged creatures ferreted about for monstrous crimes with which to horrify their stay-at-

home countrymen ; how the rich young lords, returning home with mincing steps and high-pitched lisp, surrounded by a train of parti-coloured, dialect-jabbering Venetian clowns, deft and sinister Neapolitan fencing masters, silver-voiced singing boys decoyed from some church, and cynical humanists escaped from the faggot or the gallows, were expected to bring home (together with the newest pastoral dramas, lewd novels, Platonic philosophy and madrigals set in complicated counterpoint) stories of hideous wickedness, of the murders and rapes and poisonings committed by the dukes and duchesses, the nobles and senators, in whose palaces they had so lately supped and danced. The crimes of Italy fascinated Englishmen of genius with a fascination even more potent than that exerted over the vulgar imagination of mere foppish and swash-buckler lovers of the scandalous and the sensational. They fascinated with the attraction of tragic grandeur, of psychological strangeness, of moral monstrosity, a generation in whom the passionate imagination of the playwright was curiously blent with the metaphysical analysis of the philosopher and the ethical judgment of the Puritan. To these men—ardent and serious even in their profligacy, imaginative and passionate even in their Puritanism—all sucking avidly at this newly found Italian civilization, the wickedness of Italy was more than morbidly attractive or morbidly appalling ; it was imaginatively and psychologically fascinating. Whether they were riotous and infidel

youths like the dramatist Greene, recklessly absorbing, in their avidity for new life, the corruption of Italy, glorying in the saying that "an Englishman Italianized is a demon incarnate ;" or grave and austere scholars like Ascham, thanking Heaven that had let them come undefiled from the abominable country where men were as free to sin as to wear shoe or pantocle ; whatever the nature of the individual traveller, they served only to increase their countrymen's love for the tales of Italian wickedness.

And the dramatic grandeur, the psychological interest, the mysterious fascination of Italian crime impressed most of all the men whose work was with the dramatic and the psychological—the Elizabethan playwrights. The crimes of Italy furnished the subjects for nearly half of the tragedies written in the reigns of Elizabeth and of James I. ; the play dealing with national history or with antique subjects had not, to the patriots and humanists of the end of the sixteenth century, the potent attraction of the play dealing with Italian tales of lust and of blood. Italian novels were ransacked for subjects ; Italian histories greedily consulted for details ; travellers from Italy beset for new anecdotes gleaned during their wanderings. It seemed impossible to satisfy the general greed for Italian horrors. The openly narrated, written, and printed misdeeds of the previous generation of villains, of the Borgias, Sforzas, and Aragonese of the beginning of the sixteenth century, were fused

with the whispered tales of the crimes of reigning Medicis, Farnesi, and Estensi, and spiced with the details of domestic scandal and bloodshed of the living Italian nobles of the day—the day, be it remembered, of Cencis and Accorambonis and Santa Croces, when incest and parricide could be bought off for money, and the nobles even of well-regulated republics like Venice and Lucca kept their retinue of highly paid ruffians. Various tales were fused together by the English playwrights, like those of Vittoria Accoramboni, of Bianca Cappello, and of Isabella Orsini, avowedly in Webster's "White Devil:" like those of Luisa Strozzi poisoned for resisting Duke Alexander's lust, and the Duke murdered by his pretended pander Lorenzino, in more altered and disguised fashion, in Tourneur's "Revenger's Tragedy;" numberless ghastly incidents picked up, perhaps, from old chronicles and travellers' tales, like the dance of madmen, the waxen images of murdered husband and children, the were-wolf madness of the fratricide Ferdinand, added by Webster to Bandello's story of the Duchess of Amalfi; like the corpse painted up with poison that the guilty lover might suck death in kissing its revived beauties, tacked on by Massinger to his play of the jealousy of some mythical Duke of Milan, himself a compromise between Maximilian Sforza despoiled by Charles V. and Filippo Maria Visconti murdering his guiltless wife Beatrice di Tenda. Details of crime were heaped together, either

as part of the action or as allusions, as in Webster's two great plays, in which there occurs poisoning by means of the leaves of a book, poisoning by the poisoned lips of a picture, poisoning by a helmet, poisoning by the pommel of a saddle. Crimes were multiplied by means of subordinate plots and unnecessary incidents, like the double vengeance of Richardetto and Hippolita in Ford's "Giovanni and Annabella," where both characters are absolutely unnecessary to the main story of the horrible love of the hero and heroine ; like the murders of Levidulcia and Sebastian in Tourneur's "Atheist's Tragedy," and the completely unnecessary though extremely pathetic death of young Marcello in Webster's "White Devil ;" until the plays were brought to a close by the gradual extermination of all the principal performers, and only a few confidants and dummies remained to bury the corpses which strewed the stage. Imaginary monsters were fashioned out of half-a-dozen Neapolitan and Milanese princes, by Ford, by Beaumont and Fletcher, by Middleton, by Marston, even by the light and graceful Philip Massinger : mythical villains, Ferdinands, Lodowicks, and Fernezes, who yet fell short of the frightful realities of men like Sigismondo Malatesta, Alexander VI., and Pier Luigi Farnese ; nay, mere typical monsters, with no name save their vices, Lussuriosos, Gelosos, Ambitiosos, and Vindicis, like those drawn by the strong and savage hand of Cyril Tourneur.

Nothing which the English stage could display seemed to the minds of English playwrights and the public to give an adequate picture of the abominations of Italy ; much as they heaped up horrors and combined them with artistic skill, much as they forced into sight, there yet remained an abyss of evil which the English tongue refused to mention, but which weighed upon the English mind ; and which, unspoken, nay (and it is the glory of the Elizabethan dramatists excepting Ford), unhinted, yet remained as an incubus in the consciousness of the playwrights and the public, was in their thoughts when they wrote and heard such savage misanthropic outbursts as those of Tourneur and of Marston. The sense of the rottenness of the country whence they were obtaining their intellectual nourishment, haunted with a sort of sickening fascination the imaginative and psychological minds of the late sixteenth century, of the men who had had time to outgrow the first cynical plunge of the rebellious immature contemporaries of Greene, Peele, and Marlowe into that dissolved civilization. And of the great men who were thus enthralled by Italy and Italian evil, only Shakespeare and Massinger maintain or regain their serenity and hopefulness of spirit, resist the incubus of horror : Shakespeare from the immense scope of his vision, which permitted him to pass over the base and frightful parts of human nature and see its purer and higher sides ; Massinger

from the very superficiality of his insight and the narrowness of his sympathies, which prevented his ever thoroughly realizing the very horrors he had himself invented. But on the minds less elastic than that of Shakespeare, and less superficial than that of Massinger, the Italian evil weighed like a nightmare. With an infinitely powerful and passionate imagination, and an exquisitely subtle faculty of mental analysis ; only lately freed from the dogma of the Middle Ages ; unsettled in their philosophy ; inclined by wholesale classical reading to a sort of negative atheism, a fatalistic and half-melancholy mixture of epicurism and stoicism ; yet keenly alive, from study of the Bible and of religious controversies, to all questions of right and wrong ; thus highly wrought and deeply perplexed, the minds of the Elizabethan poets were impressed by the wickedness of Italy as by the horrible deeds of one whom we are accustomed to venerate as our guide, whom we cannot but love as our benefactor, whom we cannot but admire as our superior : it was a sense of frightful anomaly, of putrescence in beauty and splendour, of death in life and life in death, which made the English psychologist-poets savage and sombre, cynical and wrathful and hopeless. The influence is the same on all, and the difference of attitude is slight, and due to individual characters ; but the gloom is the same in each of them. In the noble and tender nature of Webster the sense is one of ineffable

sadness, unmarred by cynicism, but unbrightened by hope. The villains, even if successful until death, are mere hideous phantoms—

these wretched eminent things  
Leave no more fame behind 'em, than should one  
Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow—

they are the victims of tortured conscience, or, worse still, the owners of petrified hearts ; there is nothing to envy in them. But none the better is it for the good : if Ferdinand, Bosola, Brachiano, and Flaminio perish miserably, it is only after having done to death the tender and brave Duchess, the gentle Antonio, the chivalric Marcello ; there is virtue on earth, but there is no justice in heaven. The half-pagan, half-puritanic feeling of Webster bursts out in the dying speech of the villain Bosola—

O, this gloomy world !  
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,  
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live !  
Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust  
To suffer death or shame for what is just.

Of real justice in this life or compensation in another, there is no thought : Webster, though a Puritan in spirit, is no Christian in faith. On Ford the influence is different ; although equal, perhaps, in genius to Webster, surpassing him even in intense tragic passion, he was far below Webster, and, indeed, far below all his generation, in moral fibre. The sight of evil

fascinates him ; his conscience staggers, his sympathies are bedraggled in foulness ; in the chaos of good and evil he loses his reckoning, and recognizes the superiority only of strength of passion, of passion for good or evil : the incestuous Giovanni, daring his enemies like a wild beast at bay and cheating them of their revenge by murdering the object of his horrible passion, is as heroic in the eyes of Ford as the magnanimous Princess of Sparta, bearing with unflinching spirit the misfortunes poured down upon her, and leading off the dance while messenger succeeds messenger of evil, till, free from her duties as a queen, she sinks down dead. Cyril Tourneur and John Marston are far more incomplete in genius than either Webster or Ford, although Tourneur sometimes obtains a lurid and ghastly tragic intensity which more than equals Ford when at his best ; and Marston, in the midst of crabbedness and dulness, sometimes has touches of pathos and Michelangelesque foreshortenings of metaphor worthy of Webster. But Tourneur and Marston have neither the constant sympathy with oppressed virtue of the author of the "Duchess of Malfy," nor the blind fury of passion of the poet of Giovanni and Annabella ; they look on grim and hopeless spectators at the world of fatalistic and insane wickedness which they have created, in which their heroes and heroines and villains are slowly entangled in inextricable evil. The men and women of Tourneur and Marston are scarcely men and women

at all: they are mere vague spectres, showing their grisly wounds and moaning out their miserable fate. There is around them a clammy moral darkness, dispelled only by the ghastly flashes of lurid virtue of maniacs like Tourneur's *Vindici* and *Hippolito*; a crypt-like moral stillness, haunted by strange evil murmurs, broken only by the hysterical sobs and laughs of Marston's *Antonios* and *Pandulphos*. At the most there issues out of the blood-reeking depth a mighty yell of pain, a tremendous imprecation not only at sinful man but at unsympathizing nature, like that of Marston's old Doge, dethroned, hunted down, crying aloud into the grey dawn-mists of the desolate marsh by the lagoon—

O thou all-bearing earth  
Which men do gape for till thou cram'st their mouths  
And choak'st their throats for dust : O charme thy breast  
And let me sinke into thee. Look who knocks ;  
Andrugio calls. But O, she's deafe and blinde.  
A wretch but leane relief on earth can finde.

The tragic sense, the sense of utter blank evil, is stronger in all these Elizabethan painters of Italian crime than perhaps in any other tragic writers. There is, in the great and sinister pictures of Webster, of Ford, of Tourneur, and of Marston, no spot of light, no distant bright horizon. There is no loving suffering, resigned to suffer and to pardon, like that of *Desdemona*; no consoling affection like *Cordelia's*,

in whose gentle embrace the poor bruised soul may sink into rest ; no passionate union in death with the beloved, like the union of Romeo and Juliet ; nothing but implacable cruelty, violent death received with agonized protest, or as the release from unmitigated misery with which the wretch has become familiar,

As the tann'd galley slave is with his oar.

Neither is there in these plays that solemn sense of heavenly vengeance, of the fatality hanging over a house and which will be broken when guilt shall have been expiated, such as lends a sort of serene background of eternal justice to the terrible tales of Thebes and Argos. There is for these men no fatality save the evil nature of man, no justice save the doubling of crime, no compensation save revenge : there is for Webster and Ford and Tourneur and Marston no heaven above, wrathful but placable ; there are no Gods revengeful but just : there is nothing but this blood-stained and corpse-strewn earth, defiled by lust-burnt and death-hungering men, felling each other down and trampling on one another blindly in the eternal darkness which surrounds them. The world of these great poets is not the open world with its light and its air, its purifying storms and lightnings : it is the darkened Italian palace, with its wrought-iron bars preventing escape ; its embroidered carpets muffling the foot steps ; its hidden, suddenly yawning trap-

doors ; its arras-hangings concealing masked ruffians ; its garlands of poisoned flowers ; its long suites of untenanted darkened rooms, through which the wretch is pursued by the half-crazed murderer ; while below, in the cloistered court, the clanking armour and stamping horses, and above, in the carved and gilded hall, the viols and lutes and cornets make a cheery triumphal concert, and drown the cries of the victim.

## II.

Such is the Italy of the Renaissance as we see it in the works of our tragic playwrights : a country of mysterious horror, the sinister reputation of which lasted two hundred years ; lasted triumphantly throughout the light and finikin eighteenth century, and found its latest expression in the grim and ghastly romances of the school of Ann Radcliff, romances which are but the last puny and grotesque descendants of the great stock of Italian tragedies, born of the first terror-stricken meeting of the England of Elizabeth with the Italy of the late Renaissance. Is the impression received by the Elizabethan playwrights a correct impression ? Was Italy in the sixteenth century that land of horrors ? Reviewing in our memory the literature and art of the Italian Renaissance, remembering the innumerable impressions of joyous and healthy life with which it has filled us ; recalling the bright and thoughtless rhymes of Lorenzo dei Medici, of

Politian, of Berni, and of Ariosto; the sweet and tender poetry of Bembo and Vittoria Colonna and Tasso; the bluff sensuality of novelists like Bandello and Masuccio, the Aristophanesque laughter of the comedy of Bibbiena and of Beolco; seeing in our mind's eye the stately sweet matrons and noble senators of Titian, the virginal saints and madonnas of Raphael, the joyous angels of Correggio;—recapitulating rapidly all our impressions of this splendid time of exuberant vitality, of this strong and serene Renaissance, we answer without hesitation, and with only a smile of contempt at our credulous ancestors—no. The Italy of the Renaissance was, of all things that have ever existed or ever could exist, the most utterly unlike the nightmare visions of men such as Webster and Ford, Marston and Tourneur. The only Elizabethan drama which really represents the Italy of the Renaissance is the comedy of Shakespeare, of Beaumont and Fletcher, and of Ben Jonson and Massinger: to the Renaissance belong those clear and sunny figures, Portia, Antonio, Gratiano, Viola, Petruchio, Bellario, and Almira; their faces do we see on the canvases of Titian and the frescoes of Raphael; they are the real children of the Italian Renaissance. These frightful Brachianos and Annabellas and Ferdinands and Corombonas and Vindicis and Pieros of the “White Devil,” of the “Duchess of Malfy,” of the “Revenger’s Tragedy,” and of “Antonio and Mellida,” are mere fantastic horrors, as false as the Counts

Udolpho, the Spalatos, the Zastrozzis, and all their grotesquely ghastly pseudo-Italian brethren of eighty years ago.

And, indeed, the Italy of the Renaissance, as represented in its literature and its art, is the very negation of Elizabethan horrors. Of all the mystery, the colossal horror and terror of our dramatists, there is scarce the faintest trace in the intellectual productions of the Italian Renaissance. The art is absolutely stainless : no scenes of horror, no frightful martyrdoms, as with the Germans under Albrecht Dürer ; no abominable butcheries, as with the Bolognese of the seventeenth century ; no macerated saints and tattered assassins, as with the Spaniards ; no mystery, no contortion, no horrors : vigorous and serene beauty, pure and cheerful life, real or ideal, on wall or canvas, in bronze or in marble. The literature is analogous to the art, only less perfect, more tainted with the weakness of the flesh, less ideal, more real. It is essentially human, in the largest sense of the word ; or if it cease, in creatures like Aretine, to be humanly clean, it becomes merely satyrlike, swinish, hircose. But it is never savage in lust or violence ; it is quite free from the element of ferocity. It is essentially light and quiet and well regulated, sane and reasonable, never staggering or blinded by excess : it is full of intelligent discrimination, of intelligent leniency, of well-bred reserved sympathy ; it is civilized as are the wide well-paved streets of Ferrara compared with the tortuous

black alleys of mediæval Paris ; as are the well-lit, clean, spacious palaces of Michelozzo or Bramante compared with the unhealthy, uncomfortable mediæval castles of Dürer's etchings. It is indeed a trifle too civilized ; too civilized to produce every kind of artistic fruit ; it is—and here comes the crushing difference between the Italian Renaissance and our Elizabethans' pictures of it—it is, this beautiful rich literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, completely deficient in every tragic element ; it has intuition neither for tragic event nor for tragic character ; it affords not a single tragic page in its poems and novels ; it is incapable, after the most laborious and conscientious study of Euripides and Seneca, utterly and miserably incapable of producing a single real tragedy, anything which is not a sugary pastoral or a pompous rhetorical exercise. The epic poets of the Italian Renaissance, Pulci, Boiardo, Berni, and Ariosto, even the stately and sentimental Tasso, are no epic poets at all. They are mere light and amusing gossips, some of them absolute buffoons. Their adventures over hill and dale are mere riding parties ; their fights mere festival tournaments, their enchantments mere pageant wonders. Events like the death of Hector, the slaughter of Penelope's suitors, the festive massacre of Chriemhilt, the episode of Alfonso the Chaste sending Bernardo del Carpio his father's corpse on horseback—things like these never enter their minds. When tragic events do by some

accident come into their narration, they cease to be tragic; they are frittered away into mere pretty conceits like the death of Isabella and the sacrifice of Olympia in the "Orlando Furioso;" or melted down into vague pathos, like the burning of Olindo and Sofronia, and the death of Clorinda by the sentimental Tasso. Neither poet, the one with his cheerfulness, the other with his mild melancholy, brings home, conceives the horror of the situation; the one treats the tragic in the spirit almost of burlesque, the other entirely in the spirit of elegy. So, again, with the novel writers: these professional retailers of anecdotes will pick up any subject to fill their volumes. In default of pleasant stories of filthy intrigue or lewd jest, men like Cinthio and Bandello will gabble off occasionally some tragic story, picked out of a history book or recently heard from a gossip: the stories of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, of Disdémone and the Moorish Captain, of Roméo Montecchio and Giulietta Cappelletti, of the Cardinal d'Aragona and the Duchess of Amalfi, of unknown grotesque Persian Sophis and Turkish Bassas—stories of murder, massacre, rape, incest, anything and everything, prattled off, with a few words of vapid compassion and stale moralizing, in the serene, cheerful, chatty manner in which they recount their Decameronian escapades or Rabelaisian repartees. As it is with tragic action, so is it with tragic character. The literature of the country which suggested to our Elizabethans their colossal vil-

lains, can display only a few conventional monsters, fire-eating, swashbuckler Rodomonts and Sultan Malechs, strutting and puffing like the villains of puppet-shows ; Aladins and Ismenos, enchanters and ogres fit to be put into Don Quixote's library : mere conventional rag puppets, doubtless valued as such and no more by the shrewd contemporaries of Ariosto and Tasso. The inhabitants of Tasso's world of romance are pale chivalric unrealities, lifeless as Spenser's half-allegoric knights and ladies ; those of Pulci's Ardenne forests and Cathay deserts are buffoons such as Florentine shopmen may have trapped out for their amusement in rusty armour and garlands of sausages. The only lifelike heroes and heroines are Ariosto's. And they are most untragic, unromantic. The men are occasionally small scoundrels, but unintentionally on the part of the author. They show no deep moral cancers or plague-spots ; they display cheerfully all the petty dishonour and small lusts which the Renaissance regarded as mere flesh and blood characteristics. So also Ariosto's ladies : the charming, bright women, coquettish or Amazonian, are frail and fickle to the degree which was permissible to a court lady, who should be neither prudish nor fast ; doing unchaste things and listening to unchaste words simply, gracefully, without prurience or horror ; perfectly well-bred, *gentili*, as Ariosto calls them ; prudent also, according to the notions of the day, in limiting their imprudence. The adventure of

Fiordispina with Ricciardetto would have branded an English serving-wench as a harlot ; the intentions of Roger towards the lady he has just rescued from the sea-monster might have blushinglly been attributed by Spenser to one of his satyrs ; but these were escapades quite within Ariosto's notions of what was permitted to a *gentil cavaliere* and a *nobil donzella* ; and if Fiordispina and Roger are not like Florimell and Sir Calidore, still less do they in the faintest degree resemble Tourneur and Marston's Levidulcias and Isabellas and Lussuriosos. And with the exception perhaps of this heroine and this hero, we cannot find any very great harm in Ariosto's ladies and gentlemen : we may, indeed, feel indignant when we think that they replace the chaste and noble impossibilities of earlier romance, the Rolands and Percivals, the Beatrices and Lauras of the past ; when we consider that they represent for Ariosto, not the bespattered but the spotless, not the real but the ideal. All this may awaken in us contempt and disgust ; but if we consider these figures in themselves as realities, and compare them with the evil figures of our drama, we find that they are mere venial sinners—light, fickle, amorous, fibbing—very human in their faults ; human, trifling, mild, not at all monstrous, like all the art products of the Renaissance.\*

\* The "Orlando Innamorato" of Boiardo contains, part i. canto 8, a story too horrible and grotesque for me to narrate, of a monster born of Marchino and his murdered sister-in-law, which forms a strange exception to my rule, even as does, for instance,

A serene and spotless art, a literature often impure but always cheerful, rational, civilized—this is what the Italian Renaissance displays when we seek in it for spirits at all akin to Webster or Lope de Vega, to Holbein or Ribera. To find the tragic we must wait for the Bolognese painters of the seventeenth century, for Metastasio and Alfieri in the eighteenth; it is useless seeking it in this serene and joyous Renaissance. Where, then, in the midst of these spotless virgins, these noble saints, these brilliant pseudo-chivalric joustings and revels, these sweet and sonneteering pastorals, these scurrilous adventures and loose buffooneries; where in this Italian Renaissance are the horrors which fascinated so strangely our English playwrights: the fratricides and incests, the frightful crimes of lust and blood which haunted and half crazed the genius of Tourneur and Marston? Where in this brilliant and courteous and humane and civilized nation are the gigantic villains whose terrible features were drawn with such superb awfulness of touch by Webster and Ford? Where in this Renaissance of Italian literature, so cheerful and light of conscience, is the foul and savage Renaissance of English tragedy? Does the art of Italy tell an impossible, universal lie? or is the art of England the victim of an impossible, universal hallucination?

Matteo di Giovanni's Massacre of the Innocents. Can this story have been suggested, a ghastly nightmare, by the frightful tale of Sigismondo Malatesta and the beautiful Borbona, which was current in Boiardo's day?

Neither ; for art can neither tell lies nor be the victim of hallucination. The horror exists, and the light-heartedness exists ; the unhealthiness and the healthiness. For as, in that weird story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the daughter of the Paduan wizard is nurtured on the sap and fruit and the emanations of poisonous plants, till they become her natural sustenance, and she thrives and is strong and lovely ; while the youth, bred in the ordinary pure air and nourished on ordinary wholesome food, faints and staggers as soon as he breathes the fatal odours of the poison garden, and sinks down convulsed and crazed at the first touch of his mistress' blooming but death-breathing lips ; so also the Italians, steeped in the sin of their country, seeing it daily and hourly, remained intellectually healthy and serene ; while the English, coming from a purer moral atmosphere, were seized with moral sickness of horror at what they had seen and could not forget. And the nation which was chaste and true wrote tales of incest and treachery, while the nation which was foul and false wrote poetry of shepherds and knights-errant.

The monstrous immorality of the Italian Renaissance, as I have elsewhere shown in greater detail, was, like the immorality of any other historical period, not a formal rebellion against God, but a natural result of the evolution of the modern world. The Italy of the Renaissance was one of the many victims which inevitable moral sequence dooms to be evil in

order that others may learn to be good: it was a sacrifice which consisted in a sin, a sacrifice requiring frightful expiation on the part of the victim. For Italy was subjected, during well-nigh two centuries, to a slow process of moral destruction; a process whose various factors—political disorganization, religious indifference, scientific scepticism, wholesale enthusiasm for the antique, breaking-up of mediæval standards, and excessive growth of industry, commerce, and speculative thought at the expense of warlike and religious habits—were at the same time factors in the great advent of modern civilization, of which Italy was the pioneer and the victim; a process whose result was, in Italy, insensibly and inevitably to reduce to chaos the moral and political organization of the nation; at once rendering men completely unable to discriminate between good and evil, and enabling a certain proportion of them to sin with complete impunity: creating on the one hand moral indifference, and on the other social irresponsibility. Civilization had kept pace with demoralization; the faculty of reasoning over cause and effect had developed at the expense of the faculty of judging of actions. The Italians of the Renaissance, little by little, could judge only of the adaptation of means to given ends; whether means or ends were legitimate or illegitimate they soon became unable to perceive and even unable to ask. Success was the criterion of all action, and power was its limits. Active and furious national

wickedness there was not: there was mere moral inertia on the part of the people. The Italians of the Renaissance neither resisted evil nor rebelled against virtue; they were indifferent to both, and a little pressure sufficed to determine them to either. In the governed classes, where the law was equal between men, and industry and commerce kept up healthy activity, the pressure was towards good. The artizans and merchants lived decent lives, endowed hospitals, listened to edifying sermons, and were even moved (for a few moments) by men like San Bernardino or Savonarola. In the governing classes, where all right lay in force, where the necessity of self-defence induced treachery and violence, and irresponsibility produced excess, the pressure was towards evil. The princelets and prelates and mercenary generals indulged in every sensuality, turned treachery into a science and violence into an instrument; and sometimes let themselves be intoxicated into mad lust and ferocity, as their subjects were occasionally intoxicated with mad austerity and mysticism; but the excesses of mad vice, like the excesses of mad virtue, lasted only a short time, or lasted only in individual saints or blood-maniacs; and the men of the Renaissance speedily regained their level of indifferent righteousness and of indifferent sinfulness. Righteousness and sinfulness both passive, without power of aggression or resistance, and consequently in strange and dreadful peace with each other. The wicked

men did not dislike virtue, nor the good men vice : the villain could admire a saint, and the saint could excuse a villain. The prudery of righteousness was as unknown as the cynicism of evil ; the good man, like Guarino da Verona, would not shrink from the foul man ; the foul man, like Beccadelli, would not despise the pure man. The ideally righteous citizen of Agnolo Pandolfini does not interfere with the ideally unrighteous prince of Machiavelli : each has his own position and conduct ; and who can say whether, if the positions were exchanged, the conduct might not be exchanged also ? In such a condition of things as this, evil ceases to appear monstrous ; it is explained, endured, condoned. The stately philosophical historians, so stoically grand, and the prattling local chroniclers, so highly coloured and so gentle and graceful ; Guicciardini and Machiavelli and Valori and Segni, on the one hand—Corio, Allegretti, Matarazzo, Infessura, on the other ; all these, from whom we learn the real existence of immorality far more universal and abominable than our dramatists venture to show, relate quietly, calmly, with analytical frigidness or gossiping levity, the things which we often shrink from repeating, and sometimes recoil from believing. Great statesmanlike historians and humble chattering chroniclers are alike unaffected by what goes on around them : they collect anecdotes and generalize events without the fumes of evil, among which they seek for materials in the dark places of

national or local history, ever going to their imagination, ever making their heart sicken and faint, and their fancy stagger and reel. The life of these righteous, or at least, not actively sinning men, may be hampered, worried, embittered, or even broken by the villainy of their fellow-men ; but, except in some visionary monk, life can never be poisoned by the mere knowledge of evil. Their town may be betrayed to the enemy, their daughters may be dishonoured or poisoned, their sons massacred ; they may, in their old age, be cast starving on the world, or imprisoned or broken by torture ; and they will complain and be fierce in diatribe : the fiercest diatribe written against any Pope of the Renaissance being, perhaps, that of Platina against Paul II., who was a saint compared with his successors Sixtus and Alexander, because the writer of the diatribe and his friends were maltreated by this pope. When personally touched, the Italians of the Renaissance will brook no villainy—the poniard quickly despatches sovereigns like Galeazzo Maria Sforza ; but when the villainy remains abstract, injures neither themselves nor their immediate surroundings, it awakens no horror, and the man who commits it is by no means regarded as a fiend. The great criminals of the Renaissance—traitors and murderers like Lodovico Sforza, incestuous parricides like Gianpaolo Baglioni, committers of every iniquity under heaven like Cæsar Borgia—move through the scene of Renaissance history, as

shown by its writers great and small, quietly, serenely, triumphantly ; with gracious and magnanimous bearing ; applauded, admired, or at least endured. On their passage no man, historian or chronicler, unless the agent of a hostile political faction, rises up, confronts them and says, "This man is a devil."

And devils these men were not : the judgment of their contemporaries, morally completely perverted, was probably psychologically correct ; they misjudged the deeds, but rarely, perhaps, misjudged the man. To us moderns, as to our English ancestors of the sixteenth century, this is scarcely conceivable. A man who does devilish deeds is of necessity a devil ; and the evil Italian princes of the Renaissance, the Borgias, Sforzas, Baglionis, Malatestas, and Riarios appear, through the mist of horrified imagination, so many uncouth and gigantic monsters, nightmare shapes, less like human beings than like the grand and frightful angels of evil who gather round Milton's Satan in the infernal council. Such they appear to us. But if we once succeed in calmly looking at them, seeing them not in the lurid lights and shadows of our fancy, but in the daylight of contemporary reality, we shall little by little be forced to confess (and the confession is horrible) that most of these men are neither abnormal nor gigantic. Their times were monstrous, not they. They were not, that is clear, at variance with the moral atmosphere which surrounded them ; and they were the direct result of the social and political condition.

This may seem no answer ; for although we know the causes of monster births, they are monstrous none the less. What I mean is not that the existence of men capable of committing such actions was normal ; but that the men who committed them, the conditions being what they were, were not necessarily men of exceptional character. The level of immorality was so high that a man need be no giant to reach up into the very seventh heaven of iniquity. When to massacre at a banquet a number of enemies enticed by overtures of peace was considered in Cæsar Borgia merely a rather audacious and not very holy action, indicative of very brilliant powers of diplomacy, then Cæsar Borgia required, to commit such an action, little more than a brilliant diplomatic endowment, unhampered by scruples and timidity ; when a brave, and gracious prince like Gianpaolo Baglioni could murder his kinsmen and commit incest with his sister without being considered less gracious and magnanimous, then Gianpaolo Baglioni might indeed be but an indifferent villain ; when treachery, lust, and bloodshed, although objected to in theory, were condoned in practice, and were regarded as venial sins, those who indulged in them might be in fact scarcely more than venial sinners. In short, where a fiendish action might be committed without the perpetrator being considered a fiend, there was no need of his being one. And, indeed, the great villains of the Renaissance never take up the attitude of fiends ;

one or two, like certain Visconti or Aragonese, were madmen, but the others were more or less normal human beings. There was no barrier between them and evil; they slipped into it, remained in it, became accustomed to it; but a vicious determination to be wicked, a feeling of the fiend within one, like that of Shakespeare's Richard, or a gradual, conscious irresistible absorption into recognized iniquity like Macbeth's, there was not. The mere sense of absolute power and impunity, together with the complete silence of the conscience of the public at large, can make a man do strange things. If Cæsar Borgia be free to practise his archery upon hares and deer, why should he not practise it upon these prisoners? Who will blame him? Who can prevent him? If he had for his mistress every woman he might single out from among his captives, why not his sister? If he have the force to carry out a plan, why should a man stand in his way? The complete facility in the commission of all actions quickly brings such a man to the limits of the legitimate: there is no universal cry to tell him where those limits are, no universal arm to pull him back. He pooh-poohs, pushes them a little further, and does the iniquity. Nothing prevents his gratifying his ambition, his avarice, and his lust; so he gratifies them. Soon, seeking for further gratification, he has to cut new paths in villainy: he has not been restrained by man, who is silent; he is soon restrained no longer by nature, whose only voice is in man's

conscience. Pleasure in wanton cruelty takes the same course : he prefers to throw javelins at men and women to throwing javelins at bulls or bears, even as he prefers throwing javelins at bulls or bears rather than at targets ; the excitement is greater ; the instinct is that of the soldiers of Spain and of France, who invariably preferred shooting at a valuable fresco like Sodoma's Christ, at Siena, or Lo Spagna's Madonna, at Spoleto, to practising against a mere worthless piece of wood. Such a man as Cæsar Borgia is the *ne plus ultra* of a Renaissance villain ; he takes, as all do not, absolute pleasure in evil as such. Yet Cæsar Borgia is not a fiend nor a maniac. He can restrain himself whenever circumstances or policy require it ; he can be a wise administrator, a just judge. His portraits show no degraded criminal ; he is, indeed, a criminal in action, but not necessarily a criminal in constitution, this fiendish man who did not seem a fiend to Machiavel. We are astonished at the strange anomaly in the tastes and deeds of these Renaissance villains ; we are amazed before their portraits. These men, who, in the frightful light of their own misdeeds, appear to us as complete demons or complete madmen, have yet much that is amiable and much that is sane ; they stickle at no abominable lust, yet they are no bestial sybarites ; they are brave, sober, frugal, enduring like any puritan ; they are treacherous, rapacious, cruel, utterly indifferent to the sufferings of their enemies, yet they are gentle in

manner, passionately fond of letters and art, superb in their works of public utility, and not incapable of genuinely admiring men of pure life like Bernardino or Savonarola : they are often, strange to say, like the frightful Baglionis of Perugia, passionately admired and loved by their countrymen. The bodily portraits of these men, painted by the sternly realistic art of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, are even more confusing to our ideas than their moral portraits drawn by historians and chroniclers. Cæsar Borgia, with his long fine features and noble head, is a gracious and refined prince ; there is, perhaps, a certain duplicity in the well-cut lips ; the beard, worn full and peaked in Spanish fashion, forms a sort of mask to the lower part of the face, but what we see is noble and intellectual. Sigismondo Malatesta has on his medals a head whose scowl has afforded opportunity for various fine descriptions of a blood maniac ; but the head, thus found so expressive, of this monster, is yet more human than the head on the medals of Lionello d'Este, one of the most mild and cultivated of the decently behaved Ferrarese princes. The very flower of precocious iniquity, the young Baglionis, Vitellis, and Orsinis, grouped round Signorelli's preaching Antichrist at Orvieto, are, in their gallantly trimmed jerkins and jewelled caps, the veriest assemblage of harmless young dandies, pretty and insipid ; we can scarcely believe that these mild beardless striplings, tight-waisted and well-curled like girls of

sixteen, are the terrible Umbrian brigand *condottieri*—Gianpaolos, Simonettos, Vitellozzos, and Astorres—whose abominable deeds fill the pages of the chronicles of Matarazzo, of Froliere, and of Monaldeschi. Nowhere among the portraits of Renaissance monsters do we meet with anything like those Roman emperors, whose frightful effigies, tumid, toad-like Vitelliuses or rage-convulsed Caracallas, fill all our museums in marble or bronze or loathsome purple porphyry; such types as these are as foreign to the reality of the Italian Renaissance as are the Brachianos and Lussorios, the Pieros and Corombonas, to the Italian fiction of the sixteenth century.

Nor must such anomalies between the type of the men and their deeds, between their abominable crimes and their high qualities, be made a mere subject for grandiloquent disquisition. The man of the Renaissance, as we have said, had no need to be a monster to do monstrous things; a crime did not necessitate such a moral rebellion as requires complete unity of nature, unmixed wickedness; it did not precipitate a man for ever into a moral abyss where no good could ever enter. Seeing no barrier between the legitimate and the illegitimate, he could alternate almost unconsciously between them. He was never shut out from evil, and never shut out from good; the judgment of men did not dress him in a convict's jacket which made evil his only companion; it did not lock him up in a moral dungeon where no ray

of righteousness could penetrate; he was not condemned, like the branded harlot, to hopeless infamy. He need be bad only as much and as long as he chose. Hence, on the part of the evil-doer of the Renaissance, no necessity either for violent rebellion or for sincere repentance; hence the absence of all characters such as the tragic writer seeks, developed by moral struggle, warped by the triumph of vice, or consciously soiled in virtue. What a "Revenger's Tragedy" might not Cyril Tourneur have made, had he known all the details, of the story of Alessandro de' Medici's death! What a *Vindici* he would have made of the murderer Lorenzino; with what a strange lurid grandeur he would have surrounded the plottings of the pander Brutus. But Lorenzino de' Medici had none of the feeling of Tourneur's *Vindici*; there was in him none of the ghastly spirit of self-immolation of the hero of Tourneur in his attendance upon the foul creature whom he leads to his death. Lorenzino had the usual Brutus mania of his day, but unmixed with horror. To be the pander and jester of the Duke was no pain to his nature; there was probably no sense of debasement in the knowledge either of his employer or of his employment. To fasten on Alexander, to pretend to be his devoted slave and server of his lust, this piece of loathsome acting, merely enhanced, by the ingenuity it required, the attraction of what to Lorenzino was an act of heroism. His ambition was to be a Brutus; that he had bespattered

the part probably never occurred to him. Indifference to good and evil permitted the men of the Renaissance to mix the two without any moral sickness, as it permitted them to alternate them without a moral struggle. Such is the wickedness of the Renaissance: not a superhuman fury of lust and cruelty, like Victor Hugo's Lucrezia Borgia; but an indifferent, a characterless creature like the Lucrezia Borgia of history: passive to surrounding influences, blind to good and evil, infamous in the infamous Rome, among her father and brother's courtesans and cut-throats; grave and gracious in the grave and gracious Ferrara, among the Platonic poets and pacific courtiers of the court of the Estensi. Thus, in the complete prose and colourlessness of reality, has the evil of the Renaissance been understood and represented only by one man, and transmitted to us in one pale and delicate psychological masterpiece far more loathsome than any elaborately hideous monster painting by Marston or Tourneur. This man who conceived the horrors of the Italian Renaissance in the spirit in which they were committed is Ford. In his great play he has caught the very tone of the Italian Renaissance: the abominableness of the play consisting not in the coarse slaughter scenes added merely to please the cockpit of an English theatre, but in the superficial innocence of tone; in its making evil lose its appearance of evil, even as it did to the men of the Renaissance. Giovanni and Annabella

make love as if they were Romeo and Juliet: there is scarcely any struggle, and no remorse; they weep and pay compliments and sigh and melt in true Aminta style. There is in the love of the brother and sister neither the ferocious heat of tragic lust, nor the awful shudder of unnatural evil; they are lukewarm, neither good nor bad. Their abominable love is in their own eyes a mere weakness of the flesh; there is no sense of revolt against man and nature and God; they are neither dragged on by irresistible demoniac force nor held back by the grip of conscience; they slip and slide, even like Francesca and Paolo. They pay each other sweet and mawkish compliments. The ferocious lust of Francesco Cenci is moral compared with the way in which the "trim youth" Giovanni praises Annabella's beauty; the blushing, bride-like way in which Annabella, "white in her soul," acknowledges her long love. The atrociousness of all this is, that if you strike out a word or two the scene may be read with perfect moral satisfaction, with the impression that this is really "sacred love." For in these scenes Ford wrote with a sweetness and innocence truly diabolical, not a shiver of horror passing through him—serene, unconscious; handling the filthy without sense of its being unclean, to the extent, the incredible extent, of making Giovanni and Annabella swear on their mother's ashes eternal fidelity in incest: horror of horrors, to which no Walpurgis Night abomination

could ever approach, this taking as witness of the unutterable, not an obscene Beelzebub with abominable words and rites, but the very holiest of holies. If ever Englishman approached the temper of the Italian Renaissance, it was not Tourneur, nor Shelley with his cleansing hell fires of tragic horror, but this sweet and gentle Ford. If ever an artistic picture approached the reality of such a man as Gianpaolo Baglioni, the incestuous murderer whom the Froliere chronicler, enthusiastic like Matarazzo, admires, for "his most beautiful person, his benign and amiable manner and lordly bearing," it is certainly not the elaborately villainous Francesco Cenci of Shelley, boasting like another Satan of his enormous wickedness, exhausting in his picture of himself the rhetoric of horror, committing his final enormity merely to complete the crown of atrocities in which he glories; it is no such tragic impossibility of moral hideousness as this; it is the Giovanni of Ford, the pearl of virtuous and studious youths, the spotless, the brave, who, after a moment's reasoning, tramples on a vulgar prejudice—"Shall a peevish sound, a customary form from man to man, of brother and of sister, be a bar 'twixt my eternal happiness and me?" who sins with a clear conscience, defies the world, and dies, bravely, proudly, the "sacred name" of Annabella on his lips, like a chivalrous hero. The pious, pure Germany of Luther will give the world the tragic type of the science-damned Faustus; the devout and savage Spain of

Loyola will give the tragic type of Don Juan damned for mockery of man and of death and of heaven ; the Puritan England of Milton will give the most sublimely tragic type of all, the awful figure of him who says, " Evil, be thou my good." What tragic type can this evil Italy of Renaissance give to the world ? None : or at most this miserable, morbid, compassionated Giovanni ; whom Ford would have us admire, and whom we can only dispise.

The blindness to evil which constitutes the criminality of the Renaissance is such as to give it almost an air of innocence. For the men of that time were wicked solely from a complete sophistication of ideas, a complete melting away (owing to slowly operating political and intellectual tendencies) of all moral barriers. They walked through the paths of wickedness serenely as they would have trod the ways of righteousness ; seeing no boundary, exercising their psychic limbs equally in the open and permitted spaces and in the forbidden. They plucked the fruit of evil without a glance behind them, without a desperate setting of their teeth ; plucked it openly, calmly, as they would have plucked the blackberries in the hedge ; bit into it, ate it, with perfect ease and serenity, saying their prayers before and after, as if it were their natural daily bread mentioned in the Lord's Prayer ; no grimace or unseemly leer the while ; no moral indigestion or nightmare (except very rarely) in consequence. Hence the

serenity of their literature and art. These men and women of the Italian Renaissance have, in their portraits, a very pleasing nobility of aspect: serene, thoughtful, healthy, benign. Titian's courtesans are our archetypes of dignified womanhood; we might fancy Portia or Isabella with such calm, florid beauty, so wholly unmeretricious and uncankered. The humanists and priests who lie outstretched on the acanthus-garlanded sarcophagi by Desiderio and Rossellino are the very flowers of refined and gentlemen of study; the youths in Botticelli's "Adoration of The Magi," for instance, are the ideal of Boiardo's chivalry, Rinaldos and Orlandos every one; the corseleted generals of the Renaissance, so calm and stern and frank, the Bartolomeo Colleoni of Verrocchio, the Gattamelata by Giorgione (or Giorgione's pupil), look fit to take up the banner of the crusade: that Gattamelata in the Uffizi gallery especially looks like a sort of military Milton: give him a pair of wings and he becomes at once Signorelli's archangel, clothed in heavenly steel and unsheathing the flaming sword of God. Compare with these types Holbein's courtiers of Henry VIII.; what scrofulous hogs! Compare Sanchez Coello's Philip II. and Don Carlos; what monomaniacs! Compare even Dürer's magnificent head of Willibald Pirckheimer: how the swine nature is blended with the thinker. And the swine will be subdued, the thinker will triumph. Why? Just because there is a contest—

because the thinker-Willibald is conscious of the swine-Willibald. In this coarse, brutal, deeply stained Germany of the time of Luther, affording Dürer and Holbein, alas ! how many besotten and bestial types, there will arise a great conflict : the obscene leering Death—Death-in-Life as he really is—will skulk everywhere, even as in the prints of the day, hideous and powerful, trying, with hog's snout, to drive Christ Himself out of limbo ; but he is known, seen, dreaded. The armed knight of Dürer turns away from his grimacings, and urges on his steel-covered horse. He visits even the best, even Luther in the Wartburg ; but the good men open their Bibles, cry " Vade retro ! " and throw their inkstands at him, showing themselves terrified and ruffled after the combat. And these Germans of Luther's are disgustingly fond of blood and horrors : they like to see the blood spirt from the decapitated trunk, to watch its last contortions ; they hammer with a will (in Dürer's " Passion ") the nails of the cross, they peel off strips of skin in the flagellation. But then they can master all that ; they can be pure, charitable ; they have gentleness for the hare and the rabbit, like Luther ; they kneel piously before the cross-bearing stag, like Saint Hubert. Not so the Italians. They rarely or never paint horrors, or death, or abominations. Their flagellated Christ, their arrow-riddled Sebastian, never writhe or howl with pain ; indeed, they suffer none. Judith, in Mantegna's print, puts the head of Holofernes into her bag with the

serenity of a muse ; and the head is quite clean, without loathsome drippings or torn depending strings of muscle ; unconvulsed, a sort of plaster cast. The tragedy of Christ, the tragedy of Judith ; the physical agony shadowing the moral agony ; the awfulness of victim and criminal—the whole tragic meaning was unknown to the light and cheerful contemporaries of Ariosto, to the cold and cynical contemporaries of Machiavelli.

The tragic passion and imagination which, in the noble and grotesque immaturity of the Middle Ages, had murmured confusedly in such popular legends as gave to Ezzelin the Fiend for a father, and Death and Sin for adversaries at dice ; which had stammered awkwardly but grandly in the school Latin of Mussato's tragedy of "Eccerinis ;" which had wept and stormed and imprecated and laughed for horror in the infinite tragedy—pathetic, grand, and grotesque, like all great tragedy—of Dante ; this tragic passion and imagination, this sense of the horrible and the terrible, had been forfeited by the Italy of the Renaissance, lost with its sense of right and wrong. The Italian Renaissance, supreme in the arts which require a subtle and strong perception of the excellence of mere lines and colours and lights and shadows, which demand unflinching judgment of material qualities ; was condemned to inferiority in the art which requires subtle and strong perception of the excellence of human emotion and action ; in the art

which demands unflinching judgment of moral motives. The tragic spirit is the offspring of the conscience of a people. The sense of the imaginative grandeur of evil may perhaps be a forerunner of demoralization ; but such a sense of wonder and awe, such an imaginative fascination of the grandly, superhumanly wicked ; such a necessity to magnify a villain into a demon with archangelic splendour of power of evil, can exist only in minds pure and strong, braced up to virtue, virgin of evil, with a certain childlike power of wonder ; minds to whom it appears that to be wicked requires a powerful rebellion ; minds accustomed to nature and nature's plainness, to whom the unnatural can be no subject of sophistication and cynicism, but only of wonder. While, in Italy, Giraldo Cinthio prattles off to a gay party of ladies and gentlemen stories of murder and lust as frightful as those of "Titus Andronicus," of "Giovanni and Annabella," and of the "Revenger's Tragedy," in the intelligent, bantering tone in which he tells his Decameronian tales ; in England, Marston, in his superb prologue to the second part of "Antonio and Mellida," doubts whether all his audience can rise to the conception of the terrible passions he wishes to display :

If any spirit breathes within this round  
Un capable of weighty passion,  
Who winks and shuts his apprehension up  
From common sense of what men were and are,  
Who would not know what men must be : let such  
Hurry amain from our black visaged shows ;  
We shall affright their eyes.

The great criminals of Italy were unconscious of being criminals ; the nation was unconscious of being sinful. Bembo's sonnets were the fit reading for Lucrezia Borgia ; pastorals by Guarini the dramatic amusements of Rannuccio Farnesi ; if Vittoria Accoramboni and Francesco Cenci read anything besides their prayer-book or ribald novels, it was some sugary "Aminta" or "Pastor Fido:" their own tragedies by Webster and Shelley they could never have understood.

And thus the Italians of the Renaissance walked placidly through the evil which surrounded them ; for them, artists and poets, the sky was always blue and the sun always bright, and their art and their poetry were serene. But the Englishmen of the sixteenth century were astonished and fascinated by the evil of Italy : the dark pools of horror, the dabs of infamy which had met them ever and anon in the brilliant southern cities, haunted them like nightmare, bespattered for them the clear blue sky, and danced, black and horrible spots, before the face of the sun. The remembrance of Italian wickedness weighed on them like an incubus, clung to them with a frightful fascination. While the foulest criminals of Italy discussed the platonic vapidnesses of Bembo's sonnets, and wept at the sweet and languid lamentations of Guarini's shepherds and nymphs ; the strong Englishmen of the time of Shakespeare, the men whose children were to unsheathe under Cromwell the sword of righteousness, listened awe-stricken and fascinated

with horror to the gloomy and convulsed, the grand and frightful plays of Webster and of Tourneur. And the sin of the Renaissance, which the art of Italy could neither pourtray nor perceive ; appeared on the stage decked in superb and awful garb by the tragic imagination of Elizabethan England.

THE OUTDOOR POETRY.



## THE OUTDOOR POETRY.

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THE thought of winter is bleak and barren to our mind ; the late year is chary of æsthetic as of all other food. In the country it does not bring ugliness ; but it terribly reduces and simplifies things, depriving them of two-thirds of their beauty. In sweeping away the last yellow leaves, the last crimson clouds, and in bleaching the last green grass, it effaces a whole wealth of colour. It deprives us still more by actually diminishing the number of forms : for what summer had left rich, various, complex, winter reduces to blank uniformity. There is a whole world of lovely things, shapes and tints, effects of light, colour, and perspective in a wood, as long as it is capriciously divided into a thousand nooks and crannies by projecting boughs, bushes, hedges, and hanging leaves ; and this winter clears away and reduces to a Haussmanized simplicity of plan. There is a smaller world, yet one quite big enough for a summer's day, in any hay field, among the barren oats, the

moon-daisies, the seeded grasses, the sorrel, the buttercups, all making at a distance a wonderful blent effect of luminous brown and lilac and russet foamed with white ; and forming, when you look close into it, an unlimited forest of delicately separate stems and bloom and seed ; every plant detaching itself daintily from an undefinable background of things like itself. This winter turns into a rusty brown and green expanse, or into a bog, or a field of frozen upturned clods. The very trees, stripped of their leaves, look as if prepared for diagrams of the abstraction tree. Everything, in short, is reduced most philosophically to its absolutely ultimate elements ; and beauty is got rid of almost as completely as by a metaphysical definition. This æsthetic barrenness of winter is most of all felt in southern climates, to which winter brings none of the harsh glitter and glamour of snow and ice ; leaving the frozen earth and leafless trees merely bare, without the crisp sheen of snow, the glint and glimmer of frost and icicles, forming for the denuded rigging of branches a fantastic system of ropes and folded sails. In the South, therefore, unless you go where winter never comes, and autumn merely merges into a lengthened spring, winter is more than ever negative, dreary, barren to our fancy. Yet even this southern winter gives one very lovely things : things which one scarcely notices perhaps, yet which would baffle the most skilled painter to imitate, the most skilled poet to describe. Thus,

for instance, there is a peculiar kind of morning by no means uncommon in Tuscany in what is completely winter, not a remnant of autumn or a beginning of spring. It is cold, but windless ; the sky full of sun, the earth full of mist. Sun and mist uniting into a pale luminousness in which all things lose body, become mere outline ; bodiless hills taking shape where they touch the sky with their curve ; clear bodiless line of irregular houses, of projecting ilex roundings and pointed cypresses marking the separation between hill and sky, the one scarcely more solid, corporeal than the other ; the hill almost as blue as the sky, the sky almost as vaporous as the hill ; the tangible often more ghostlike than the intangible. But the sun has smitten the higher hills, and the vapours have partially rolled down, in a scarcely visible fold, to their feet ; and the high hill, not yet rock or earth, swells up into the sky as something real, but fluid and of infinite elasticity. All in front the plain is white with mist ; or pinkish grey with the unseen agglomeration of bare tree boughs and trunks, of sere field ; till, nearer us, the trees become more visible, the short vinebearing elms in the fields, interlacing their branches compressed by distance ; the clumps of poplars, so scant and far between from near, so serried and compact from afar ; and between them an occasional flush, a tawny vapour of the orange twigged osiers ; and then, still nearer, the expanse of sere field, of mottled, crushed-together, yellowed grass and

grey brown leaves ; things of the summer which winter is burying to make room for spring. Along the reaches of the river the clumps of leafless poplars are grey against the pale, palest blue sky ; grey but with a warmth of delicate brown, almost of rosiness. Grey also is the shingle in the river bed ; the river itself either (if after rain) pale brown, streaked with pale blue sky reflections ; or (after a drought), low, grey, luminous throughout its surface, you might think, were it not that the metallic sheen, the vacillating sparkles of where the sun, smiting down, frets it into a shifting mass of scintillating facets, gives you the impression that this other luminousness of silvery water must be dull and dead. And, looking up the river, it gradually disappears, its place marked only, against the all-pervading pale blue haze, by the brownish grey spectre of the furthest poplar clumps.

This, I have said, is an effect which winter produces, nay, even a southern winter, with those comparatively few and slight elements at its disposal. We see it, notice it, and enjoy its delicate loveliness ; but while so doing we do not think, or we forget, that the habit of noticing, nay, the power of perceiving such effects as this, is one of those habits and powers which we possess, so to speak, only since yesterday. The possibility of reproducing in painting effects like this one ; or, more truthfully, the wish to reproduce them, is scarcely as old as our own century ; it is, perhaps, the latest born of all our artistic wishes and

possibilities. But the possibility of any visible effect being perceived and reproduced by the painter, usually precedes—at least where any kind of pictorial art already exists—the perception of such effects by those who are not painters, and the attempt to reproduce them by means of words. We do not care to admit that our grandfathers were too unlike ourselves, lest ourselves should be found too unlike our grandchildren. We hold to the metaphysic fiction of man having always been the same, and only his circumstances having changed ; not admitting that the very change of circumstances implies something new in the man who altered them ; and similarly we shrink from the thought of the many things which we used never to notice, and which it has required a class of men endowed with special powers of vision to find out, copy, and teach us to see and appreciate. Yet there is scarcely one of us who has not a debt towards some painter or writer for first directing his attention to objects or effects which may have abounded around him, but unnoticed or confused with others. The painters, as I have said, the men who see more keenly and who study what they have seen, naturally come first ; nor does the poet usually describe what his contemporary painter attempts not to paint. An exception might, perhaps, require to be made for Dante, who would seem to have seen and described many things left quite untouched by Giotto, and even by Raphael ; but in estimating Dante we must be careful

to distinguish the few touches which really belong to him, from the great mass of colour and detail which we have unconsciously added thereto, borrowing from our own experience and from innumerable pictures and poems which, at the moment, we may not in the least remember ; and having done so, we shall be led to believe that those words which suggest to us so clear and coloured a vision of scenes often complex and uncommon, presented to his own mind only a comparatively simple and incomplete idea : the atmospheric effects, requiring a more modern painter than Turner, which we read between the lines of the "Inferno" and the "Purgatorio," most probably existed as little for Dante as they did for Giotto ; the poet seeing and describing in reality only salient forms of earth and rock, monotonous in tint and deficient in air, like those in the backgrounds of mediæval Tuscan frescoes and panels. Be this as it may, the fact grows daily on me that men have not at all times seen in the same degree the nature which has always equally surrounded them ; and that during some periods they have, for explicable reasons, seen less not only than their successors, but also than their predecessors ; and seen that little in a manner conventional in proportion to its monotony. There are things about which certain historic epochs are strangely silent ; so much so, indeed, that the breaking of the silence impresses us almost as the more than human breaking of a spell ; and that silence is the result of a grievous wrong, of a moral disease

which half closes the eyes of the fancy, or of a moral poison which presents to those sorely aching eyes only a glimmer amid darkness. And it is as the most singular instance of such conditions that I should wish to study, in themselves, their causes and effects, the great differences existing between the ancients and ourselves on the one hand, and the men of the genuine Middle Ages on the other, in the degree of interest taken respectively by each in external nature, the seasons and that rural life which seems to bring us into closest contact with them both.

There is, of course, a considerable difference between the manner in which the country, its aspects and occupations, are treated by the poets of Antiquity and by those of our own day ; in the mode of enjoying them of an ancient who had read Theocritus and Virgil and Tibullus, and a modern whose mind is unconsciously full of the influence of Wordsworth or Shelley or Ruskin. But it is a mere difference of mode ; and is not greater, I think, than the difference between the descriptions in the "Allegro," and the descriptions in "Men and Women ;" than the difference between the love of our Elizabethans for the minuter details of the country, the flowers by the stream, the birds in the bushes, the ferrets, frogs, lizards, and similar small creatures ; and the pleasure of our own contemporaries in the larger, more shifting, and perplexing forms and colours of cloud, sunlight, earth, and rock. The description of effects such as these latter ones, nay, the

attention and appreciation given to them, are things of our own century, even as is the power and desire of painting them. Landscape, in the sense of our artists of to-day, is a very recent thing ; so recent that even in the works of Turner, who was perhaps the earliest landscape painter in the modern sense, we are forced to separate from the real rendering of real effects, a great deal in which the tints of sky and sea are arranged and distributed as a mere vast conventional piece of decoration. Nor could it be otherwise. For, in poetry as in painting, landscape could become a separate and substantive art only when the interest in the mere ins and outs of human adventure, in the mere structure and movement of human limbs, had considerably diminished. There is room, in epic or drama, only for such little scraps of description as will make clearer, without checking, the human action ; as there is place, in a fresco of a miracle, or a little picture of carousing and singing bacchantes and Venetian dandies, only for such little bits of laurel grove, or dim plain, or blue alpine crags, as can be introduced in the gaps between head and head, or figure and figure.

Thus, therefore, a great difference must exist between what would be felt and written about the country and the seasons by an ancient, by a man of the sixteenth century, or by a contemporary of our own : a difference, however, solely of mode ; for we feel sure that of the three men each would find something to delight himself and wherewith to delight

others among the elm-bounded English meadows, the flat cornfields of central France, the vine and olive yards of Italy—wherever, in short, he might find himself face to face and, so to speak, hand in hand with Nature. But about the man of the Middle Ages (unless, perhaps, in Italy, where the whole Middle Ages were merely an earlier Renaissance) we could have no such assurance ; nay, we might be persuaded that, however great his genius, be he even a Gottfried von Strassburg, or a Walther von der Vogelweide, or the unknown Frenchman who has left us “Aucassin et Nicolette,” he would bring back impressions only of two things, authorized and consecrated by the poetic routine of his contemporaries—of spring and of the woods.

There is nothing more characteristic of mediæval poetry than this limitation. Of autumn, of winter ; of the standing corn, the ripening fruit of summer ; of all these things so dear to the ancients and to all men of modern times, the Middle Ages seem to know nothing. The autumn harvests, the mists and wondrous autumnal transfiguration of the humblest tree, or bracken, or bush ; the white and glittering splendour of winter, and its cosy life by hearth or stove ; the drowsiness of summer, its suddenly inspired wish for shade and dew and water, all this left them stolid. To move them was required the feeling of spring, the strongest, most complete and stirring impression which, in our temperate climates, can be given by Nature :

the whole pleasurable-ness of warm air, clear moist sky, the surprise of the shimmer of pale green, of the yellowing blossom on tree tops, the first flicker of faint shadow where all has been uniform, colourless, shadeless ; the replacing of the long silence by the endless twitter and trill of birds, endless in its way as is the sea, twitter and trill on every side, depths and depths of it, of every degree of distance and faintness, a sea of bird song ; and along with this the sense of infinite renovation to all the earth and to man's own heart. Of all Nature's effects this one alone goes sparkling to the head ; and it alone finds a response in mediæval poetry. Spring, spring, endless spring—for three long centuries throughout the world a dreary green monotony of spring all over France, Provence, Italy, Spain, Germany, England ; spring, spring, nothing but spring even in the mysterious countries governed by the Grail King, by the Fairy Morgana, by Queen Proserpine, by Prester John ; nay, in the new Jerusalem, in the kingdom of Heaven itself, nothing but spring ; till one longs for a bare twig, for a yellow leaf, for a frozen gutter, as for a draught of water in the desert. The green fields and meadows enamelled with painted flowers, how one detests them ! how one would rejoice to see them well sprinkled with frost or burnt up to brown in the dry days ! the birds, the birds which warble through every sonnet, canzone, sirventes, glosa, dance lay, roundelay, virelay, rondel, ballade, and whatsoever else it may

be called,—how one wishes them silent for ever, or their twitter, the tarantarantandei of the eternal German nightingale especially, drowned by a good howling wind! After any persistent study of mediæval poetry, one's feeling towards spring is just similar to that of the morbid creature in Schubert's "Müllerin," who would not stir from home for the dreadful, dreadful greenness, which he would fain bleach with tears, all around:

Ich möchte ziehn in die Welt hinaus, hinaus in die weite Welt,  
Wenn's nur so grün, so grün nicht wär da draussen in Wald und  
Feld.

Moreover this mediæval spring is the spring neither of the shepherd, nor of the farmer, nor of any man to whom spring brings work and anxiety and hope of gain; it is a mere vague spring of gentle-folk, or at all events of well-to-do burgesses, taking their pleasure on the lawns of castle parks, or the green holiday places close to the city, much as we see them in the first part of "Faust;" a sweet but monotonous charm of grass, beneath green lime tree, or in the South the elm or plane; under which are seated the poet and the fiddler, playing and singing for the young women, their hair woven with chaplets of fresh flowers, dancing upon the sward. And poet after poet, Provençal, Italian, and German, Nithart and Ulrich, and even the austere singer of the Holy Grail, Wolfram, pouring out verse after verse of the songs in praise

of spring, which they make even as girls wind their garlands: songs of quaint and graceful ever-changing rhythm, now slowly circling, now bounding along, now stamping out the measure like the feet of the dancers, now winding and turning as wind and twine their arms in the long-linked mazes; while the few and ever-repeated ideas, the old, stale platitudes of praise of woman, love pains, joys of dancing, pleasure of spring (spring, always spring, eternal, everlasting spring) seem languidly to follow the life and movement of the mere metre. Poets, these German, Provençal, French, and early Italian lyrists, essentially (if we venture to speak heresy) not of ideas or emotions, but of metre, of rhythm and rhyme; with just the minimum of necessary thought, perpetually presented afresh just as the words, often and often repeated and broken up and new combined, of a piece of music—poetry which is in truth a sort of music, dance or dirge or hymn music as the case may be, more than anything else.

As it is in mediæval poetry with the seasons, so it is likewise with the country and its occupations: as there is only spring, so there is only the forest. Of the forest, mediæval poetry has indeed much to say; more perhaps, and more familiar with its pleasures, than Antiquity. There is the memorable forest where the heroes of the Nibelungen go to hunt, followed by their waggons of provisions and wine; where Siegfried overpowers the bear, and returns to his

laughing comrades with the huge thing chained to his saddle ; where, in that clear space which we see so distinctly, a lawn on to which the blue black firs are encroaching, Siegfried stoops to drink of the spring beneath the lime tree, and Hagen drives his boar-spear straight through the Nibelung's back. There is the thick wood, all a golden haze through the young green, and with an atmosphere of birds' song, where King Mark discovers Tristram and Iseult in the cave, the deceitful sword between them, as Gottfried von Strassburg relates with wonderful luscious charm. The forest, also, more bleak and austere, where the four outlawed sons of Aymon live upon roots and wild animals, where they build their castle by the Meuse. Further, and most lovely of all, the forest in which Nicolette makes herself a hut of branches, bracken, and flowers, through which the stars peep down on her whiteness as she dreams of her Lord Aucassin. The forest where Huon meets Oberon ; and Guy de Lusignan, the good snake-lady ; and Parzival finds on the snow the feathers and the drops of blood which throw him into his long day-dream ; and Owen discovers the tomb of Merlin ; the forest, in short, which extends its interminable glades and serried masses of trunks and arches of green from one end to the other of mediæval poetry. It is very beautiful, this forest of the Middle Ages ; but it is monotonous, melancholy ; and has a terrible eeriness in its endlessness. For there is nothing else. There are no meadows where

the cows lie lazily, no fields where the red and purple kerchiefs of the reapers overtop the high corn ; no orchards, no hayfields ; nothing like those hill slopes where the wild herbs encroach upon the vines, and the goats of Corydon and Damoetas require to be kept from mischief ; where, a little lower down, the Athenian shopkeeper of Aristophanes goes daily to look whether yesterday's hard figs may not have ripened, or the vine wreaths pruned last week have grown too lushly. Nor anything of the sort of those Umbrian meadows, where Virgil himself will stop and watch the white bullocks splashing slowly into the shallow, sedgy Clitumnus ; still less like those hamlets in the corn-fields through which Propertius would stroll, following the jolting osier waggon, or the procession with garlands and lights to Pales or to the ochre-stained garden god. Nothing of all this : there are no cultivated spots in mediæval poetry ; the city only, and the castle, and the endless, all-encompassing forest.

And to this narrowness of mediæval notions of outdoor life, inherited together with mediæval subjects by the poets even of the sixteenth century, must be referred the curious difference existing between the romance poets of antiquity, like Homer in the *Odyssey*, and the romance poets — Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, Camoens—of modern times, in the matter of —how shall I express it?— the ideal life, the fortunate realms, the “Kennaqwhere.” In Homer, in all the ancients, the ideal country is merely a more delightful

reality; and its inhabitants happier everyday men and women; in the poetry sprung from the Middle Ages it is always a fairyland constructed by mechanics and architects. For, as we have seen, the Middle Ages could bequeath to the sixteenth century no ideal of peaceful outdoor enjoyment. Hence, in the poetry of the sixteenth century, still permeated by mediæval traditions, an appalling artificiality of delightfulness. Fallerina, Alcina, Armida, Acrasia, all imitated from the original Calypso, are not strong and splendid god-women, living among the fields and orchards, but dainty ladies hidden in elaborate gardens, all bedizened with fashionable architecture: regular palaces, pleasaunces, with uncomfortable edifices, artificial waterfalls, labyrinths, rare and monstrous plants, parrots, apes, giraffes; childish splendours of gardening and engineering and menageries, which we meet already in "Ogier the Dane" and "Huon of Bordeaux," and which later poets epitomized out of the endless descriptions of Colonna's "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili," and the still more frightful inventories of the Amadis romances. They are, each of them, a kind of anticipated Marly, Versailles, Prince Elector's Friedrichsruhe or Nymphenburg, with clipped cypresses and yews, doubtless, and (O Pales and Pan!) flowerbeds filled with coloured plaster and spas, and cascades spirting out (thanks to fifty invisible pumps) under your feet and over your head. All the vineyards and cornfields have been swept away to

make these solemn terraces and water-works ; all the cottages which, with their little wooden shrine, their humble enclosure of sunflowers and rosemary and fruit trees, their buzzing hives and barking dogs, were loved and sung even by town rakes like Catullus and smart coffeehouse wits like Horace ; all these have been swept away to be replaced by the carefully constructed (wire?) bowers, the aviaries, the porticoes, the frightful circular edifice (*tondo è il ricco edificio*), a masterpiece of Palladian stucco work, in which Armida and Rinaldo, Acrasia and her Knight, drearily disport themselves. What has become of Calypso's island ? of the orchards of Alcinous ? What would the noble knights and ladies of Ariosto and Spenser think of them ? What would they say, these romantic, dainty creatures, were they to meet Nausicaa with the washed linen piled on her waggon ? Alas ! they would take her for a laundress. For it is the terrible aristocratic idleness of the Middle Ages, their dreary delicacy, which hampers Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, even in the midst of their most unblushing plagiarisms from Antiquity : their heroes and heroines have been brought up, surrounded by equeries and duennas, elegant, useless things, or at best (the knights at least) good only for aristocratic warfare. Plough or prune ! defile the knightly hands ! wash or cook, ply the loom like Nausicaa, Calypso, or Penelope ! The mere thought sends them very nearly into a faint. No : the ladies of mediæval romance must sit quiet, idle ; at most they may sing to the

lute ; and if they work with their hands, it must be some dreary, strictly useless, piece of fancy work ; they are hot-house plants, all these dainty folk.

Had they no eyes, then, these poets of the Middle Ages, that they could see, among all the things of Nature, only those few which had been seen by their predecessors ? At first one feels tempted to think so, till the recollection of many vivid touches in spring and forest descriptions persuades one that, enormous as was the sway of tradition among these men, they were not all of them, nor always, repeating mere conventional platitudes. This singular limitation in the mediæval perceptions of Nature—a limitation so important as almost to make it appear as if the Middle Ages had not perceived Nature at all—is most frequently attributed to the prevalence of asceticism, which, according to some critics, made all mediæval men into so many repetitions of Bernard of Clairvaux, of whom it is written that, being asked his opinion of Lake Lemman, he answered with surprise that, during his journey from Geneva to the Rhone Valley, he had remarked no lake whatever, so absorbed had he been in spiritual meditations. But the predominance of asceticism has been grossly exaggerated. It was a state of moral tension which could not exist uninterruptedly, and could exist only in the classes for whom poetry was not written. The mischief done by asceticism was the warping of the moral nature of men, not of their æsthetic feelings ; it had no influence upon

the vast numbers, the men and women who relished the profane and obscene fleshliness and buffoonery of stage plays and fabliaux, and those who favoured the delicate and exquisite immoralities of Courtly poetry. Indeed, the presence of whole classes of writings, of which such things as Boccaccio's Tales, the "Wife of Bath," and Villon's "Ballades," on the one hand, and the songs of the troubadours, the poem of Gottfried, and the romance or rather novel of "Flamenca," are respectively but the most conspicuous examples, ought to prove only too clearly that the Middle Ages, for all their asceticism, were both as gross and as æsthetic in sensualism as antiquity had been before them. We must, therefore, seek elsewhere than in asceticism, necessarily limited, and excluding the poetry-reading public, for an explanation of this peculiarity of mediæval poetry. And we shall find it, I think, in that which during the Middle Ages could, because it was an all-regulating social condition, really create universal habits of thought and feeling, namely, feudalism. A moral condition like asceticism must leave unbiassed all such minds as are incapable of feeling it; but a social institution like feudalism walls in the life of every individual, and forces his intellectual movements into given paths; nor is there any escape, excepting in places where, as in Italy and in the free towns of the North, the feudal conditions are wholly or partially unknown. To feudalism, therefore, would I ascribe this, which appears at first so purely æsthetic, as

opposed to social, a characteristic of the Middle Ages. Ever since Schiller, in his "Gods of Greece," spoke for the first time of undivinized Nature (*die entgötterte Natur*), it has been the fashion among certain critics to fall foul of Christianity for having robbed the fields and woods of their gods, and reduced to mere manured clods the things which had been held sacred by antiquity. Desecrated in those long mediæval centuries Nature may truly have been, but not by the holy water of Christian priests. Desecrated because out of the fields and meadows was driven a divinity greater than Pales or Vertumnus or mighty Pan, the divinity called *Man*. For in the terrible times when civilization was at its lowest, the things of the world had been newly allotted ; and by this new allotment, man—the man who thinks and loves and hopes and strives, man who fights and sings—was shut out from the fields and meadows, forbidden the labour, nay, almost the sight, of the earth ; and to the tending of kine, and sowing of crops, to all those occupations which antiquity had associated with piety and righteousness, had deemed worthy of the gods themselves, was assigned, or rather condemned, a creature whom every advancing year untaught to think or love, or hope, or fight, or strive ; but taught most utterly to suffer and to despair. For a man it is difficult to call him, this mediæval serf, this lump of earth detached from the field and wrought into a semblance of manhood, merely that the soil of which it is part should

be delved and sown, and then manured with its carcass or its blood ; nor as a man did the Middle Ages conceive it. The serf was not even allowed human progenitors : his foul breed had originated in a lewd miracle ; his stupidity and ferocity were as those of the beasts ; his cunning was demoniac ; he was born under God's curse ; no words could paint his wickedness, no persecutions could exceed his deserts ; the whole world turned pale at his crime, for he it was, he and not any human creature, who had nailed Christ upon the cross. Like the hunger and sores of a fox or a wolf, his hunger and his sores are forgotten, never noticed. Were it not that legal and ecclesiastical narratives of trials (not of feudal lords for crushing and contaminating their peasants, but of peasants for spitting out and trampling on the consecrated wafer) give us a large amount of pedantically stated detail ; tell us how misery begat vice, and filth and starvation united families in complicated meshes of incest, taught them depopulation as a virtue and a necessity ; and how the despair of any joy in nature, of any mercy from God, hounded men and women into the unspeakable orgies, the obscene parodies, of devil worship ; were it not for these horrible shreds of judicial evidence (as of tatters of clothes or blood-clotted hairs on the shoes of a murderer) we should know little or nothing of the life of the men and women who, in mediæval France and Germany, did the work which had been taught by Hesiod and Virgil. About all these

tragedies the literature of the Middle Ages, ready to show us town vice and town horror, dens of prostitution and creaking, overweighted gibbets, as in Villon's poems, utters not a word. All that we can hear is the many-throated yell of mediæval poets, noble and plebeian, French, Provençal, and German, against the brutishness, the cunning, the cruelty, the hideousness, the heresy of the serf, whose name becomes synonymous with every baseness; which, in mock grammatical style, is declined into every epithet of wickedness; whose punishment is prayed for from the God whom he outrages by his very existence; a hideous clamour of indecent jibe, of brutal vituperation, of senseless accusation, of every form of words which furious hatred can assume, the echoes of which reached even countries like Tuscany, where serfdom was well-nigh unknown, and have reached even to us in the scraps of epigram still bandied about by the townsfolk against the peasants, nay, by the peasants against themselves.<sup>1</sup> A monstrous

<sup>1</sup> The reader may oppose to my views the existence of the class of poems, French, Latin, and German, of which the Provençal *Pastourela* is the original type, and which represent the courting, by the poet, who is, of course, a knight, of a beautiful country-girl, who is shown us as feeding her sheep or spinning with her distaff. But these poems are, to the best of my knowledge, all of a single pattern, and extremely insincere and artificial in tone, that I feel inclined to class them with the pastorals—Dresden china idylls by men who had never looked a live peasant in the face—of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as distant descendants from the pastoral poetry of antiquity, of which the chivalric poets may have got some indirect notions as they did of the antique epics. It is moreover extremely

rag doll, dressed up in shreds of many-coloured villainy, without a recognizable human feature, dragged in the

likely that these love poems, in which, successfully or unsuccessfully, the poet usually offers a bribe to the woman of low degree, conceal beneath the conventional pastoral trappings the intrigues of minnesingers and troubadours with women of the small artizan or village proprietor class. The real peasant woman—the female of the villain—could scarcely have been above the notice of the noblemen's servants; and, in countries where the seignorial rights were in vigour, would scarcely have been offered presents and fine words. As regards the innumerable poems against the peasantry, I may refer the reader to an extremely curious publication of "Carmina Medii Ævi," recently made by Sig. Francesco Novati, and which contains, besides a selection of specimens, a list of references on the subject of poems "De Natura Rusticorum." One of the satirical declensions runs as follows:

<i>Singulariter.</i>	<i>Pluraliter.</i>
<i>Nom.</i> Hic villanus.	<i>Nom.</i> Hi maledicti.
<i>Gen.</i> Huius rustici.	<i>Gen.</i> Horum tristium.
<i>Dat.</i> Huic tferfero ( <i>sic</i> ).	<i>Dat.</i> His mendacibus.
<i>Acc.</i> Hunc furem.	<i>Acc.</i> Hos nequissimos.
<i>Voc.</i> O latro.	<i>Voc.</i> O pessimi.
<i>Abl.</i> Ab hoc depredatore.	<i>Abl.</i> Ab his infidelibus.

The accusation of heresy and of crucifying Christ is evidently due to the devil-worship prevalent among the serfs, and is thus alluded to in a north Italian poem, probably borrowed from the French:

Christo fo da villan crucificò,  
E stagom sempre in pioza, in vento, e in neve,  
Perchè havom fato cosi gran peccà.

This feeling is exactly analogous to that existing nowadays in semi-barbarous countries against the Jews. The idle hated the industrious, and hated them all the more when their industry brought them any profit.

mud, pilloried with unspeakable ordure, paraded in mock triumph like a King of Fools, and burnt in the market-place like Antichrist, such is the image which mediæval poetry has left us of the creature who was once the pious rustic, the innocent god-beloved husbandman, on whose threshold justice stopped a while when she fled from the towns of Antiquity.

Yet not so; I can recall one, though only one, occasion in which mediæval literature shows us the serf. The place is surely the most unexpected, the charming thirteenth century tale of "Aucassin et Nicolette." In his beautiful essay upon that story, Mr. Pater has deliberately omitted this episode, which is indeed like a spot of blood-stained mud upon some perfect tissue of silver flowers on silver ground. It is a piece of cruellest realism, because quite quiet and unforced, in the midst of a kind of fairy-land idyl of almost childish love, the love of the beautiful son of the lord of Beaucaire for a beautiful Saracen slave girl. For, although Aucassin and Nicolette are often separated, and always disconsolate—she in her wonderfully frescoed vaulted room, he in his town prison—there is always surrounding them a sort of fairy land of trees and flowers, a constant song of birds; although they wander through the woods and tear their delicate skin, and catch their hair in brambles and briars, we have always the sense of the daisies bending beneath their tread, of the green leaves rustling aside from their heads covered with hair

“blond et menu crespelé.” Their very hardships are lovely, like the hut of flowering branches and grasses which Nicolette builds for herself, and through whose fissures the moonlight shines and the little stars twinkle : so much so, that when they weep, these two beautiful and dainty creatures, we listen as if to singing, and with no more sense of grief than at some pathetic little snatch of melody. And in the midst of this idyl of lovely things ; in the midst of all these delicate patternings, whose minuteness and faint tint merge into one vague pleasurable impression ; stands out, unintentionally placed there by the author, little aware of its terrible tragic realism, the episode which I am going to translate.

“Thus Aucassin wandered all day through the forest, without hearing any news of his sweet love ; and when he saw that dusk was spreading, he began bitterly to weep. As he was riding along an old road, where weeds and grass grew thick and high, he suddenly saw before him, in the middle of this road, a man such as I am going to describe to you. He was tall, ugly ; nay, hideous quite marvellously. His face was blacker than smoked meat, and so wide, that there was a good palm’s distance between his eyes ; his cheeks were huge, his nostrils also, with a very big flat nose ; thick lips as red as embers, and long teeth yellow and smoke colour. He wore leathern shoes and gaiters, kept up with string at the knees ; on his back was a parti-coloured coat. He was leaning

upon a stout bludgeon. Aucassin was startled and fearful, and said :

“ ‘ Fair brother ( “ beau frère ”—a greeting corresponding to the modern “ bon homme ” )! God be with thee ! ’

“ ‘ God bless you ! ’ answered the man.

“ ‘ What dost thou here ? ’ asked Aucassin.

“ ‘ What is that to you ? ’ answered the man.

“ ‘ I ask thee from no evil motive. ’

“ ‘ Then tell me why, ’ said the man, ‘ you yourself are weeping with such grief? Truly, were I a rich man like you, nothing in the world should make me weep. ’

“ ‘ And how dost thou know me ? ’

“ ‘ I know you to be Aucassin, the son of the Count ; and if you will tell me why you weep, I will tell you why I am here. ’

“ ‘ I will tell thee willingly, ’ answered Aucassin. ‘ This morning I came to hunt in the forest ; I had a white greyhound, the fairest in the world ; I have lost him—that is why I am weeping. ’

“ ‘ What ! ’ cried the man ; ‘ it is for a stinking hound that you waste the tears of your body? Woe to those who shall pity you ; you, the richest man of this country. If your father wanted fifteen or twenty white greyhounds, he could get them. I am weeping and mourning for more serious matters. ’

“ ‘ And what are these ? ’

“ ‘ I will tell you. I was hired to a rich farmer to

drive his plough, dragged by four bullocks. Three days ago, I lost a red bullock, the best of the four. I left the plough, and sought the red bullock on all sides, but could not find him. For three days I have neither eaten nor drunk, and have been wandering thus. I have been afraid of going to the town, where they would put me in jail, because I have not wherewith to pay for the bullock. All I possess are the clothes on my back. I have a mother ; and the poor woman had nothing more valuable than me ; since she had only an old smock wherewith to cover her poor old limbs. They have torn the smock off her back, and now she has to lie on the straw. It is about her that I am afflicted more than about myself, because, as to me, I may get some money some day or other, and as to the red bullock, he may be paid for when he may. And I should never weep for such a trifle as that. Ah ! woe betide those who shall make sorrow with you ! ”

Inserted merely to give occasion to show Aucassin’s good heart in paying the twenty *sols* for the man’s red bullock ; perhaps for no reason at all, but certainly with no idea of making the lover’s misery seem by comparison trifling—there are, nevertheless, few things in literature more striking than the meeting in the wood of the daintily nurtured boy, weeping over the girl whom he loves with almost childish love of the fancy ; and of that ragged, tattered, hideous serf, at whose very aspect the Bel Aucassin stops in awe

and terror. And the attitude is grand of this unfortunate creature, who neither begs nor threatens, scarcely complains, and not at all for himself; but merely tells his sordid misfortune with calm resignation, as if used to such everyday miseries, roused to indignation only at the sight of the tears which the fine-bred youth is shedding. We feel the dreadful solemnity of the man's words; of the reproach thus thrown by the long-suffering serf, accustomed to misfortunes as the lean ox is to blows, to that delicate thing weeping for his lady love, for the lady of his fancy. It is the one occasion upon which that delicate and fantastic mediæval love poetry, that fanciful, wistful stripling King Love of the Middle Ages, in which he keeps high court, and through which he rides in triumphal procession, laughing and fainting by turns with all his dapper artificiality of woes—is confronted with the sordid reality, the tragic impersonation of all the dumb miseries, the lives and loves, crushed and defiled unnoticed, of the peasantry of those days. Yes, while they sing—Provençals, minnesingers, Sicilians, sing of their earthly lady and of their paramour in heaven—the hideous peasant, whose naked granny is starving on the straw, looks on with dull and tearless eyes; crying out to posterity, as the serf cries to Aucassin: "Woe to those who shall sorrow at the tears of such as these."

## II.

But meanwhile, during those centuries which lie between the dark ages and modern times, the Middle Ages (inasmuch as they mean not a mere chronological period, but a definite social and mental condition) fortunately did not exist everywhere. Had they existed, it is almost impossible to understand how they would ever throughout Europe have come to an end; for as the favourite proverb of Catharine of Siena has it, one dead man cannot bury another dead man; and the Middle Ages, after this tedious dying of the fifteenth century, required to be shovelled into the tomb, nay, rather, given the final stroke, by the Renaissance. This that we foolishly call—giving a quite incorrect notion of sudden and miraculous birth—the Renaissance, and limit to the time of the revival of Greek humanities, really existed, as I have repeatedly suggested, wherever, during the mediæval centuries, the civilization of which the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were big was not, by the pressure of feudalism and monasticism, made to be abortive or stillborn. Low as was Italy at the very close of the dark ages, and much as she borrowed for a long while from the more precocious northern nations, especially France and Provence; Italy had, nevertheless, an enormous advantage in the fact that her populations were not divided into victor and vanquished, and that the old Latin institutions of town and country were never

replaced, except in certain northern and southernmost districts, by feudal arrangements. The very first thing which strikes us in the obscure Italian commonwealths of early times, is that in these resuscitated relics of Roman or Etruscan towns there is no feeling of feudal superiority and inferiority ; that there is no lord, and consequently no serf. Nor is this the case merely within the city walls. The never sufficiently appreciated difference between the Italian free burghs and those of Germany, Flanders, and Provence, is that the citizens depend only in the remotest and most purely fictitious way upon any kind of suzerain ; and moreover that the country, instead of belonging to feudal nobles, belongs every day more and more completely to the burghers. The peasant is not a serf, but one of three things—a hired labourer, a possessor of property, or a farmer, liable to no taxes, paying no rent, and only sharing with the proprietor the produce of the land. By this latter system, existing, then as now, throughout Tuscany, the peasantry was an independent and well-to-do class. The land owned by one man (who, in the commonwealths, was usually a shopkeeper or manufacturer in the town) was divided into farms small enough to be cultivated—vines, olives, corn, and fruit—by one family of peasants, helped perhaps by a paid labourer. The thriftier and less scrupulous peasants could, in good seasons, put by sufficient profit from their share of the produce to suffice after some years, and with the addition of what

the women might make by washing, spinning, weaving, plaiting straw hats (an accomplishment greatly insisted upon by Lorenzo dei Medici), and so forth, to purchase some small strip of land of their own. Hence, a class of farmers at once living on another man's land and sharing its produce with him, and cultivating and paying taxes upon land belonging to themselves.

Of these Tuscan peasants we get occasional glimpses in the mediæval Italian novelists—a well-to-do set of people, in constant communication with the town where they sell their corn, oil, vegetables, and wine, and easily getting confused with the lower class of artizans with whom they doubtless largely intermarried. These peasants whom we see in tidy kilted tunics and leathern gaiters, driving their barrel-laden bullock carts, or riding their mules up to the red city gates in many a Florentine and Sieneſe painting of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, were in many respects better off than the small artizans of the city, heaped up in squalid houses, and oppressed by the greater and smaller guilds. Agnolo Pandolfini, teaching thrift to his sons in Alberti's charming treatise on "The Government of the Family," frequently groans over the insolence, the astuteness of the peasantry; and indeed seems to consider that it is impossible to cope with them—a conclusion which would have greatly astounded the bailiffs of the feudal proprietors in the Two Sicilies and beyond the Alps. Indeed it

is impossible to conceive a stranger contrast than that between the northern peasant, the starved and stunted serf, whom Holbein drew, driving his lean horses across the hard furrow, with compassionate Death helping along the plough; and the Tuscan farmer, as shown us by Lorenzo dei Medici—the young fellow who, while not above minding his cows or hoeing up his field, goes into Florence once a week, offers his sweetheart presents of coral necklaces, silk staylaces, and paint for her cheeks and eyelashes; who promises, to please her, to have his hair frizzled (as only the youths of the Renaissance knew how to be frizzled and fuzzed) by the barber, and even dimly hints that some day he may appear in silken jerkin and tight hose, like a well-to-do burgess. No greater contrast perhaps, unless indeed we should compare his sweetheart, Lorenzo's beautiful Nenciozza, with her box full of jewels, her Sunday garb of damask kirtle and gold-worked bodice, her almost queenly ways towards her adorers, with the wretched creature, not a woman, but a mere female animal, cowering among her starving children in her mud cottage, and looking forward, in dull lethargy, after the morning full of outrages at the castle, to the night, the night on the heath, lit with mysterious flickers, to the horrible joys of the sacrifice which the oppressed brings to the dethroned, the serf to Satan; when, in short, we compare the peasant woman described by Lorenzo with the female serf resuscitated by the genius of Michelet; nay, more

poignant still, with that mother in the "Dance of Death," seated on the mud flood of the broken-roofed, dismantled hovel, stewing something on a fire of twigs, and stretching out vain arms to her poor tattered baby boy, whom, with the good-humoured tripping step of an old nurse, the kindly skeleton is leading away out of this cruel world.

Such were the conditions of the peasantry of the great Italian commonwealths. They were, as much as the northern serfs were the reverse, creatures pleasant to deal with, pleasant to watch.

The upper classes, on the other hand, differed quite as much from the upper classes of feudal countries. They were, be it remembered, men of business, constantly in contact with the working classes ; Albizis, Strozis, Pandolfinis, Guignis, Tolomeis, no matter what their name, these men who built palaces and churches which outdid the magnificence of northern princes, and who might, at any moment, be sent ambassadors from Florence, Lucca, or Siena, to the French or English kings, to the Emperor or the Pope, spent a large portion of their days at their office desk, among the bales of their warehouses, behind the counter of their shops ; they wore the same dress, had the same habits, spoke the same dialect, as the weavers and dyers, the carriers and porters whom they employed, and whose sons might, by talent and industry, amass a fortune, build palaces, and go ambassadors to kings in their turn. When, therefore, these merchant

nobles turned to the country for rest and relief from their cares, it was not to the country as it existed for the feudal noble of the North. Boar and stag hunts had no attraction for quiet men of business ; forests stocked with wild beasts where vineyard and cornfield might have extended, would have seemed to them the very height of wastefulness, discomfort, and ugliness. Pacific and businesslike, they merely transferred to the country the habits of thought and of life which had arisen in the city. Not for them any imitation of the feudal castle, turreted and moated, cut up into dark irregular rooms and yards, filled with noisy retainers and stinking hounds. On some gentle hillside a well-planned palace, its rooms spacious and lofty, and sparsely windowed for coolness in summer ; with a neat cloistered court in the centre, ventilating the whole house, and affording a cool place, full of scent of flowers and sound of fountains for the burning afternoons ; a belvedere tower also, on which to seek a breeze on stifling nights, when the very stars seem faint for heat, and the dim plummy heads of cypress and poplar are motionless against the misty blue sky. In front a broad terrace, whence to look down towards the beloved city, a vague fog of roofs in the distance ; on the side and behind, elaborate garden walks walled with high walls of box and oak and laurel, in which stand statues in green niches ; gardens with little channels to bring water, even during droughts, to the myrtles, the roses, the stocks and clove pinks, over

which bend with blossoms brilliant against the pale blue sky the rose-flowered oleander, the scarlet-flowered pomegranate ; also aviaries and cages full of odd and harmless creatures, ferrets, guinea pigs, porcupines, squirrels, and monkeys ; arbours where wife, daughters, and daughters-in-law may sew and make music ; and neat lawns where the young men may play at quoits, football, or swordsticks and bucklers ; and then, sweeping all round the house and gardens and terraces an undulating expanse of field and orchard, smoke-tinted with olive, bright green in spring with budding crops, russet in autumn with sere vines ; and from which, in the burning noon, rises the incessant sawing noise of the cicalas, and ever and anon the high, nasal, melancholy chant of the peasant, lying in the shade of barn door or fig tree till the sun shall sink and he can return to his labour. If the house in town, with its spacious store-rooms, its carved chapel, and painted banqueting hall, large enough to hold sons' children and brothers' wives and grandchildren, and a whole host of poor relatives, whom the wise father (as Pandolfini teaches) employs rather than strangers for his clerks and overseers—if this town house was the pride of the Italian burgess ; the villa, with its farms and orchards, was the real joy, the holiday paradise of the over-worked man. To read in the cool house, with cicala's buzz and fountain plash all round, the Greek and Latin authors ; to discuss them with learned men ; to watch the games of the

youths and the children, this was the reward for years of labour and intelligence ; but sweeter than all this (how we feel it in Agnolo Pandolfini's speeches !) were those occupations which the city could not give : the buying and selling of plants, grain, and kine, the meddling with new grafted trees, the mending of spaliers, the straightening of fences, the going round (with the self-importance and impatience of a cockney) to see what flowers had opened, what fruit had ripened over-night ; to walk through the oliveyards, among the vines ; to pry into stable, pig-stye, and roosting-place, taking up handfuls of drying grain, breaking twigs of olives, to see how things were doing ; and to have long conversations with the peasants, shrewd enough to affect earnest attention when the master was pleased to vent his town-acquired knowledge of agriculture and gardening. Sweet also, doubtless, for younger folk, or such perhaps as were fonder of teaching new lute tunes to the girls than of examining into cabbages, and who read Dante and Boccaccio more frequently than Cicero or Sallust—though sweet perhaps only as a vague concomitant of their lazy pleasures, to listen to those songs of the peasantry rising from the fields below, while lying perhaps on one's back in the shaded grass, watching the pigeons whirring about the belvedere tower. Vaguely pleasant this also, doubtless ; but for a long while only vaguely. For, during more than two centuries, the burgesses of Italy were held enthralled by the Courtly poets of

other countries ; listening to, and reading, at first, only Provençals and Sicilians, or Italians, like Sordello, pretending to be of Provence or Sicily ; and even later, enduring in their own poets, their own Guittones, Cavalcantis, Cinos, Guinicellis, nay even in Dante and Petrarch's lyrics, only the repetition (however vivified by genius) of the old common-places of Courtly love, and artificial spring, of the poetry of feudal nations. But the time came when not only Provençal and Sicilian, but even Tuscan, poetry was neglected, when the revival of Greek and Latin letters made it impossible to rewrite the threadbare mediæval prettinesses, or even to write in earnest in the modern tongue, so stiff and thin (as it seemed) and like some grotesque painted saint, when compared with the splendidly fleshed antique languages, turning and twining in graceful or solemn involutions, as of a Pyrrhic or a maidens' dance. And it was during this period, from Petrarch to Politian, that, as philologists have now proved beyond dispute, the once fashionable chivalric romance, and the poetry of the Provençal, and Sicilian school, cast off by the upper classes, was gradually picked up by the lower and especially by the rural classes. Vagabond ballad-singers and storytellers—creatures who wander from house to house, mending broken pottery, collecting rags or selling small pedlar's wares—were the old clothesmen who carried about these bits of tarnished poetic finery. The people of the town, constantly in presence of the

upper classes, and therefore sooner or later aware of what was or was not in fashion, did not care long for the sentimental daintiness of mediæval poetry ; besides, satire and scurrility are as inevitable in a town as are dogs in gutters and cats on roofs ; and the townsfolk soon set their own buffoonish or satirical ideas to whatever remained of the music of mediæval poetry : already early in the fifteenth century the sonnet had become for the Florentine artizans a mere scurrilous epigram. It was different in the country. The peasant, at least the Tuscan peasant, is eminently idealistic and romantic in his literary tastes ; it may be that he has not the intellectual life required for any utterances or forms of his own, and that he consequently accepts poetry as a ready-made ornament, something pretty and exotic, which is valued in proportion to its prettiness and rarity. Be the reason whatever it may, certain it is that nothing can be too artificial or high-flown to please the Italian peasantry : its tales are all of kings, princesses, fairies, knights, winged horses, marvellous jewels, and so forth ; its songs are almost without exception about love, constancy, moon, stars, flowers. Such things have not been degraded by familiarity and parody as in the town ; they retain for the country folk the vague charm (like that of music, automatic and independent of thorough comprehension) of belonging to a sphere of the marvellous ; hence they are repeated and repeated with almost religious servility, as any one

may observe who will listen to the stories and verses told and sung even nowadays in the Tuscan country, or who will glance over the splendid collections of folklore made in the last twenty years. Such things must suffer alteration from people who can neither read nor write, and who cannot be expected to remember very clearly details which, in many cases, must have for them only the vaguest meaning. The stories split in process of telling and re-telling, and are completed with bits of other stories ; details are forgotten and have to be replaced ; the same happens with poetry : songs easily get jumbled together, their meaning is partially obliterated, and has to be restored ; or, again, an attempt is made by bold men to adapt some seemingly adaptable old song to a new occasion ; an old love ditty seems fit to sing to a new sweetheart—names, circumstances, and details require arranging for this purpose ; and hence more alterations. Now, however much a peasant may enjoy the confused splendours of Court life and of Courtly love, he cannot, with the best will in the world, restore their details or colouring if they happen to become obliterated. If he chance to forget that when the princess first met the wizard she was riding forth on a snow-white jennet with a falcon on her glove, there is nothing to prevent his describing her as walking through the meadow in charge of a flock of geese ; and similarly, should he happen to forget that the Courtly lover compares the skin of his mistress to ivory and her eyes to Cupid's

torches, he is quite capable of filling up the gap by saying that the girl is as white as a turnip and as bright-eyed as a ferret. As with details of description and metaphors, so also with the emotional and social parts of the business. The peasant has not been brought up in the idea that the way to gain a woman's affection is to stick her glove on a helmet and perform deeds of prowess closely resembling those of Don Quixote in the Sierra Morena; so he attempts to ingratiate himself by offering her presents of strawberries, figs, buttons, hooks-and-eyes, and similar desirable things. Again, were the peasant to pay attentions to a married woman, he would merely get (what noble husbands were too well bred to dream of) a sound horsewhipping, or perhaps even a sharp knife thrust in his stomach; so that he takes good care to address his love songs only to marriageable young women. In this way, without any deliberate attempt at originality, the old Courtly poetry becomes, when once removed to the country, thoroughly patched and seamed with rustic ideas, feelings, and images; while never ceasing to be, in its general stuff and shape, of a kind such as only professional poets of the upper classes can produce. The Sicilian lyrics collected by Signor Pitri, still more the Tuscan poems of Tigri's charming volume, are, therefore, a curious mixture of highflown sentiment, dainty imagery, and most artistic arrangements of metre and diction (especially in the *rispetto*, where metrical involution is accompanied by

logical involution of the most refined mediæval sort), with hopes and complaints such as only a farmer could frame, with similes and descriptions such as only the business of the field, vineyard, and dairy could suggest. A mixture, but not a jumble. For as in this slow process of assimilation and alteration only that was remembered by the peasant which the peasant could understand and sympathize with ; and only that was welded into the once Courtly poetry which was sufficiently refined to please the people who delighted in the exotic refinement—as, in short, everything came about perfectly simply and unconsciously, there resulted what in good sooth may be considered as a perfectly substantive and independent form of art, with beauties and refinements of its own. And, indeed, it appears to me that one might say, without too much paradox, that in these peasant songs only does the poetry of minnesingers and troubadours become thoroughly enjoyable ; that only when the conventionality of feeling and imagery is corrected by the freshness, the straightforwardness, nay, even the grotesqueness of rural likings, dislikings, and comparisons, can the dainty beauty of mediæval Courtly poetry ever really satisfy our wishes. Comparing together Tigri's collection of Tuscan folk poetry with any similar anthology that might be made of middle high German and Provençal, and early Italian lyrics, I feel that the adoption of Courtly mediæval poetry by the Italian peasantry of the Renaissance can be

compared more significantly than at first seemed with the adoption of a once fashionable garb by country folk. The peasant pulled about this Courtly lyricism, oppressively tight in its conventional fit and starched with elaborate rhetorical embroideries; turned it inside out, twisted a bit here, a bit there, ripped open seam after seam, patched and repatched with stuffs and stitches of its own; and then wore the whole thing as it had never been intended to be worn; until this cast-off poetic apparel, stretched on the freer moral limbs of natural folk, faded and stained by weather and earth into new and richer tints, had lost all its original fashionable stiffness, and crudeness of colour, and niminy-piminy fit, and had acquired instead I know not what grace of unexpectedness, picturesqueness, and ease.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Any one who is sceptical of the Courtly derivation of the Italian popular song may, besides consulting the admirable book of Prof. d'Ancona, compare with the contents of Tigri's famous "Canti popolari Toscani," the following scraps of Sicilian and early Italian lyrics:—

The Emperor Frederick II. writes: "Rosa di maggio—Colorita e fresca—Occhi hai fini—E non rifini—Di gioie dare—Lo tuo parlare—La gente innamora—Castella ed altura."

Jacopo Pugliesi says of his lady: "Chiarita in viso più che argento—Donami allegrezze—Ben eo son morto—E mal colto—Se non mi dai conforto—*Fior dell' orto.*"

Inghilfredi Siciliano: "Gesù Cristo ideolla in paradiso—E poi la fece angelo incarnando—Gioia aggio preso di giglio novello—E vago, che sormonta ogni ricchezza—Sua dottrina m' affrezza—Cosi mi coglie e olezza—Come pantera le bestie selvagge."

Jacopo da Lentino: "E di virtute tutte l' altre avanza—E

Well ; for many a year did the song of the peasants rise up from the fields and oliveyards unnoticed by the good townsfolk taking their holiday at the Tuscan villa ; but one day, somewhere in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, the long-drawn chant of the *rispetto*, telling perhaps how the singer's sweetheart was beautiful as the star Diana, so beautiful as a baby that the Pope christened her with his own hands ; the quavering nasal cadence of the *stornello* saying by chance—

Flower of the Palm, &c.,

did at last waken the attention of one lettered man, a man of curious and somewhat misshapen body and mind, of features satyr-like in ugliness, yet moody and mystical in their very earthiness ; a man essentially of the senses, yet imperfect in them, without taste or smell, and, over and above, with a marvellously supple intellect ; weak and coarse and idealistic ; and at once feebly the slave of his times, and so boldly, spontaneously innovating as to be quite unconscious

*somigliante a stella è di splendore—Colla sua conta (cf. Provençal coindeta, gentile) e gaia innamoranza—E più bella è che rosa e che fiore—Cristo le doni vita ed allegrezza—E sì la cresca in gran pregio ed onore.*"

I must finish off what might be a much longer collection with a charming little scrap, quite in *rispetto* tone, by Guinicelli : " *Vedut 'ho la lucente stella diana—Ch' appare anzi che 'l giorno renda albore—Ch' a preso forma di figura umana—Sovr' ogni altra mi par che dia splendore—Viso di neve colorato in grana—Occhi lucenti, gai e pien d'amore—Non credo che nel mondo sia cristiana—Si piena di beltate e di valore.*"

of innovation : the mixed nature, or rather the nature in many heterogeneous bits, of the man of letters who is artistic almost to the point of being an actor, natural in every style because morally connected with no style at all. The man was Lorenzo di Piero dei Medici, for whom posterity has exclusively reserved the civic title of all his family and similar town despots, calling him the Magnificent. It is the fashion at present to give Lorenzo only the leavings, as it were, of our admiration for the weaker, less original, nay, considerably enervate, humanistic exquisite Politian ; and this absurd injustice appears to me to show that the very essence and excellence of Lorenzo is not nowadays perceived. The Renaissance produced several versatile and charming poets ; and, in the midst of classic imitation, one or two, of whom one is certainly Boiardo, of real freshness and raciness. But of this new element in the Renaissance, this element which is neither imitation of antiquity nor revival of mediæval, which is original, vital, fruitful, in short, modern, Lorenzo is the most versatile example. He is new, Renaissance, modern ; not merely in this or that quality, he is so all round. And this in the first place because he is so completely the man of impressions ; the man not uttering wonderful things, nor elaborating exquisite ones, but artistically embodying with marvellous versatility whatever strikes his fancy and feeling—fancy and feeling which are as new as the untouched sculptor's clay. And this extraordinary

temper of art for art's sake, or rather effect for effect and form's sake, was possible in that day only in a man equally without strong passions, and without strong convictions. He is naturally attracted most by what is most opposed to the academic, Virgilian, Horatian, or Petrarchesque æstheticism of his contemporaries ; he is essentially a realist, and all the effects which he produces, all the beauty, charm, or beastliness of his work, corresponds to beauty, charm, or beastliness in the reality of things. If Lorenzo writes at one moment carnival songs of ribald dirtiness, at the next hymns full of holy solemnity ; it is, I think, merely because this versatile artist takes pleasure in trying whether his face may not be painted into grinning drunkenness, and then elongated and whitened into ascetic gentleness. Instead of seeking, like most of his contemporaries, to be Greek, Roman, or mediæval by turns, he preferred trying on all the various tricks of thought and feeling which he remarked among his unlettered townfolk. His realism naturally drew him towards the classes where realism can deal with the real ; and not the affected, the self-conscious, the deliberately attempted. Hence those wonderful little poems, the carnival songs of the gold-thread spinners, of the pastry-cooks, of the shoemakers, which give us so completely, so gracefully, the whole appearance, work, manner, gesture of the people ; give them to us with ease and rapidity so perfect, that we scarcely know how they are given ; that we almost

forget verses and song, and actually see the pulling, twisting, and cutting of the gold-threads ; that we see and hear the shoemaker's hands smoothing down the leather of the shoe in his hand, to convince his customers of its pliability ; that we see and smell the dear little pale yellow pasties nestling in the neat white baskets, after having stood by and watched the dough being kneaded, chopped, and floured over, the iron plates heated in the oven, the soft, half-baked paste twisted and bent ; nay, we feel almost as if we had eaten of them, those excellent things which seem such big mouthfuls but are squeezed and crunched at one go like nothing at all. Hence, I mean from this love of watching effects and reproducing them, originated also the masterpiece of Lorenzo dei Medici, the "Nencia da Barberino."

This poem, of some fifty octaves, is the result of those Tuscan peasant songs, of which I have told you the curious Courtly descent, at last having struck the fancy of a real poet. It is, what Lorenzo's masterpiece necessarily must be, in the highest degree a modern performance ; as modern as a picture by Bastien Lepage ; as an opera, founded upon local music, by Bizet. For it is not by any manner of means a pastoral, a piece of conventional poetic decoration, with just a little realistic detail, more of the mere conventional or more of the realistic dominating according as it is a pastoral by Theocritus, or a pastoral by Quinault or Metastasio. It is the very reverse of

this : it is the attempt to obtain a large and complete, detailed and balanced impression by the cunning arrangement of a number of small effects which the artist has watched in reality ; it is the making into a kind of little idyl, something half narrative, half drama, with distinct figures and accessories and background, of a whole lot of little fragments imitated from the peasant poetry, and set in thin, delicate rims of imitation no longer of the peasant's songs, but of the peasant's thoughts and speech ; a perfect piece of impressionist art, marred only in rare places by an attempt (inevitable in those days) to force the drawing and colour into caricature. The construction, which appears to be nowhere, is in reality a masterpiece ; for, without knowing it, you are shown the actors, the background, the ups and downs of temper, the variation of the seasons ; above all you are shown the heroine through the medium of the praises, the complaints, the narratives of the past, the imaginings of the future, of the hero, whose incoherent rhapsodizing constitutes the whole poem. He, Valléra, is a well-to-do young farmer ; she, Nencia, is the daughter of peasant folk of the castellated village of Barberino in the Mugello ; he is madly in love, but shy, and (to all appearance) awkward, so that we feel convinced that of all these speeches in praise of his Nenciozza, in blame of her indifference, highly poetic flights and most practical adjurations to see all the advantages of a good match, the young woman hears few or none ;

Valléra is talking not to her, but at her, or rather, he is rehearsing to himself all the things which he cannot squeeze out in her presence. It is the long day-dream, poetic, prosaic, practical, and imaginative, of a love-sick Italian peasant lad, to whom his sweetheart is at once an ideal thing of beauty, a goddess at whose shrine songs must be sung and wreaths twined; and a very substantial lass, who cannot be indifferent to sixpenny presents, and whom he cannot conceive as not ultimately becoming the sharer of his cottage, the cooker of his soup, the mender of his linen, the mother of his brats—a dream in which image is effaced by image, and one thought is expelled, unfinished, by another. She is to him like the Fairy Morgana, the fairy who kept so much of chivalry in her enchanted island; she is like the evening star when above his cottage it slowly pierces the soft blue sky with its white brilliancy; she is purer than the water in the well, and sweeter than the malmsey wine, and whiter than the miller's flour; but her heart is as hard as a pebble, and she loves driving to distraction a whole lot of youths who dangle behind her, captives of those heart-thievish eyes of hers. But she is also a most excellent housewife, can stand any amount of hard field labour, and makes lots of money by weaving beautiful woollen stuff. To see her going to church of a morning, she is a little pearl! her bodice is of damask, and her petticoat of bright colour, and she kneels down carefully where she may

be seen, being so smart. And then, when she dances! —a born dancer, bouncing like a little goat, and twirling more than a mill-wheel; and when she has finished she makes you such a curtsey; no citizen's wife in Florence can curtsey as she does. It was in April that he first fell in love. She was picking salad in the garden; he begged her for a little, and she sent him about his business. Alas, alas! ever since then his peace has been gone; he cannot sleep, he can only think of her, and follow her about; he has become quite good-for-nothing as to his field work,—yet he hears all the people around laughing and saying, "Of course Valléra will get her." Only *she* will pay no heed to him. She is finer to look at than the Pope, whiter than the whitest wood core: she is more delectable than are the young figs to the earwigs, more beautiful than the turnip flower, sweeter than honey. He is more in love with her than the moth is in love with the lamp; she loves to see him perishing for her. If he could cut himself in two without too much pain, he would, just to let her see that he carries her in his heart. No; he would cut out his heart, and when she has touched it with that slender hand of hers, it would cry out, "Nencia, Nencia bella." But, after all, he is not to be despised: he is an excellent labourer, most learned in buying and selling pigs, he can play the bagpipe beautifully; he is rich, is willing to go to any expense to please her, nay, even to pay the barber double that his hair may be nice and fuzzy from the crimping irons; and

if only he were to get himself tight hose and a silk jerkin, he would be as good as any Florentine burgess. But she will not listen ; or, rather, she listens and laughs. Yes, she sits up in bed at night and laughs herself to death at the mere thought of him, that is all he gets. But he knows what it is ! There is a fellow who will keep sneaking about her ; if Valléra only catch him near his cottage, won't he give him a taste of his long new knife ! nay, rip him up and throw his bowels, like those of a pig, to dry on a roof ! He is sorry—perhaps he bores her—God bless you, Nencia !—he had better go and look after his sheep.

All this is not the poetry of the Renaissance peasant ; it is the poem made out of his reality ; the songs which Valléra sang in the fields about his Nencia we must seek in the volume of Tigri ; those *rispetti* and *stornelli* of to-day are the *rispetti* and *stornelli* of four centuries ago ; they are much more beautiful and poetic than any of Lorenzo's work ; but Lorenzo has given us not merely a peasant's love-song ; he has given us a peasant's thoughts, actions, hopes, fears ; he has given us the peasant himself, his house, his fields, and his sweetheart, as they exist even now. For Lorenzo is gone, and, greater than he, the paladins and ladies of Boiardo and Ariosto, have followed the saints and virgins of Dante into the limbo of fair unrealities ; and the very Greek and Roman heroes of a hundred years ago, the very knights and covenanters of forty years since, have joined them ; but Valléra exists still, and still

in the flesh exists his Nenciozza. Everything changes, except the country and the peasant. For, in the long farms of Southern Tuscany, with double row of blackened balcony all tapestried with heavy ingots of Indian corn, and spread out among the olives of the hillside, up which twists the rough bullock road protected by its vine trellis ; and in the little farms, with queer hood-shaped double roofs (as if to pull over the face of the house when it blows hard), and pigeon towers which show that some day they must have been fortified, all about Florence ; farms which I pass every day, with their sere trees all round, their rough gardens of bright dahlias and chrysanthemums dragged by the autumn rains—in these there are, do not doubt it, still Nencias : magnificent creatures, fit models for Amazons, only just a trifle too full-blown and matronly ; but with real Amazonian limbs, firm and delicate, under their red and purple striped cotton frocks ; creatures with heads set on necks like towers or columns, necks firm set in broad, well-fleshed chest as branches in a tree's trunk ; great penthouses of reddish yellow or lustreless black crimped hair over the forehead ; the forehead, like the cheeks, furrowed a good deal—perhaps we dainty people might say, faded and wrinkled by work in the burning sun and the wind ; women whom you see shovelling bread into the heated ovens, or plashing in winter with bare arms in half-frozen streams, or digging up a turnip field in the drizzle ; or on a Sunday, standing listless by their door, surrounded

by rolling and squalling brats, and who, when they slowly look up at the passer-by, show us, on those monumental faces of theirs, a strange smile, a light of bright eyes and white teeth ; a smile which to us sophisticated townspeople is as puzzling as certain sudden looks in some comely animal, but which yet makes us understand instinctively that we have before us a Nencia ; and that the husband yonder, though he now swears at his wife, and perhaps occasionally beats her, has nevertheless, in his day, dreamed, argued, raged, and sung to himself just like Lorenzo's Valléra.

The "Nencia da Barberino" is certainly Lorenzo dei Medici's masterpiece : it is completely and satisfactorily worked out. Yet we may strain possibilities to the point of supposing (which, however, I cannot for a moment suppose) that this "Nencia" is a kind of fluke ; that by an accident a beautiful and seemingly appreciative poem has resulted where the author, a mediæval realist of a superior Villon sort, had intended only a piece of utter grotesqueness. But important as is the "Nencia," Lorenzo has left behind him another poem, greatly inferior in completeness, but which settles beyond power of doubt that in him the Renaissance was not merely no longer mediæval, but most intensely modern. This poem is the "Ambra." It is simply an allegorical narrative of the inundation, by the river Ombrone, of a portion, called Ambra, of the great Medicean villa of Poggio a Caiano. Lorenzo's object was evidently to write a semi-Ovidian poem, of a kind

common in his day, and common almost up to our own : a river-god, bearded, crown of reeds, urn, general dampness and uproariousness of temper all quite correct ; and a nymph, whom he pursues, who prays to the Virgin huntress to save her from his love, and who, just in the nick of time, is metamorphosed into a mossy stone, dimly showing her former woman's shape ; the style of thing, charming, graceful, insipid, of which every one can remember a dozen instances, and which immediately brings up to the mind a vision of grand-ducal gardens, where, among the clipped ilexes and the cypress trunks, great lumbering water-gods and long-limbed nymphs splash, petrified and covered with melancholy ooze and yellow lichen, among the stagnant grotto waters. In some respects, therefore, there is in the "Ambra" somewhat more artificial, more *barrocco* than that early Renaissance of Politian and Pontano would warrant. There also several bits, half graceful, half awkward, pedantic, constrained, childish, delightful, like the sedge-crowned rivers telling each other anecdotes of the ways and customs of their respective countries, and especially the charming dance of zephyr with the flowers on the lawns of Cyprus, which must immediately suggest pictures by Piero di Cosimo and by Botticelli. So far, therefore, there is plenty to enjoy, but nothing to astonish, in the "Ambra." But the Magnificent Lorenzo has had the extraordinary whim of beginning his allegory with a description, twenty-one stanzas long, of the season

of floods. A description, full of infinitely delicate minute detail : of the plants which have kept their foliage while the others are bare—the prickly juniper, the myrtle and bay ; of the flocks of cranes printing the sky with their queer shapes, of the fish under the ice, and the eagle circling slowly round the ponds—little things which affect us mixed up as they are with all manner of stiff classic allusions, very much as do the carefully painted daisies and clover among the embossed and gilded unrealities of certain old pictures. From these rather finikin details, Lorenzo passes, however, to details which are a good deal more than details, things little noticed until almost recently : the varying effect of the olives on the hillside—a grey, green mass, a silver ripple, according as the wind stirs them ; the golden appearance of the serene summer air, and so forth ; details no longer, in short, but essentially, however minute, effects. And then, suddenly leaving such things behind, he rushes into the midst of a real picture, a picture which you might call almost impressionistic, of the growth of rivers and the floods. The floods are a grand sight ; more than a sight—a grand performance, a drama ; sometimes, God knows, a tragedy. Last night, under a warm, hazy sky, through whose buff-tinted clouds the big moon crept in and out, the mountain stream was vaguely visible—a dark riband in its wide shingly bed, when the moon was hidden ; a narrow, shallow, broken stream, sheets of brilliant metallic sheen, and

showers of sparkling facets, when the moon was out ; a mere drowsy murmur mixing with the creaking and rustling of dry reeds in the warm, wet wind. Thus in the evening. Look down from your window next morning. A tremendous rushing mass of waters, thick, turbid, reddish, with ominous steel-like lustre where its coppery surface reflects the moist blue sky, now fills the whole bed, shaking its short fringe of foam, tossing the spray as it swirls round each still projecting stone, angrily tugging at the reeds and alders which flop their dragged green upon its surface ; eddying faster and faster, encircling each higher rock or sand-bank, covering it at last with its foaming red mass. Meanwhile, the sky is covered in with vaporous grey clouds, which enshroud the hills ; the clear runnels dash over the green banks, spirt through the walls, break their way across the roads ; the little mountain torrents, dry all summer, descend, raging rivers, red with the hill soil ; and with every gust of warm wind the river rises higher and rushes along tremendously impetuous. Down in the plain it eats angrily at the soft banks, and breaks its muddy waters, fringed on the surface with a sort of ominous grime of broken wood and earth, higher and higher against the pier-heads of the bridges ; shaking them to split their masonry, while crowds of men and women look on, staring at the rising water, at the planks, tables, beams, cottage thatches, nay, whole trees, which it hurls at the bridge piers. And then, perhaps, the terrible,

soft, balmy flood-wind persisting, there comes suddenly the catastrophe ; the embankment, shaken by the resistless current, cracks, fissures, gives way ; and the river rushes into the city, as it has already rushed into the fields, to spread in constantly rising, melancholy livid pools, throughout the streets and squares.

This Lorenzo saw, and, wonderful to say, in this soiled and seething river, in these torn and crumbling banks, in all the dreadfulness of these things, he saw a beauty and a grandeur. But he saw not merely the struggle of the waters and of the land ; he — the heartless man who laid his hand even upon the saved-up money of orphan girls in order to keep up the splendour of his house and of his bank—saw the misfortunes of the peasantry ; the mill, the cottage by the riverside, invaded by the flood ; the doors burst open by the tremendous rushing stream, the stables and garners filled with the thick and oozy waters ; the poor creatures, yesterday prosperous, clinging to the roof, watching their sheep and cows, their hay, and straw, and flour, the hemp bleached in the summer, the linen spun and woven in the long winter, their furniture and chattels, their labour and their hope, whirled along by the foaming river.

Thus by this versatile Lorenzo dei Medici, this flippant, egotistic artist and despot, has at last been broken the long spell of the Middle Ages. The Renaissance has sung no longer of knights and of spring, but of peasants and of autumn. An immoral

and humanistic time, an immoral and humanistic man, have had at length a heart for the simpler, ruder, less favoured classes of mankind; an eye for the bolder, grander, more solemn sights of Nature: modern times have begun, modern sympathies, modern art are in full swing.

SYMMETRIA PRISCA.



## SYMMETRIA PRISCA.



Mirator veterum, discipuloque memor,  
Defuit una mihi symmetria prisca. Pergi  
Quod potui ; Veniam da mihi, posteritas.

—*Lionardo da Vinci's epitaph by Platino Piatto.*

INTO the holy enclosure which had received the precious shiploads of earth from Calvary, the Pisans of the thirteenth century carried the fragments of ancient sculpture brought from Rome and from Greece ; and in the Gothic cloister enclosing the green sward and dark cypresses of the graveyard of Pisa, the art of the Middle Ages came for the first time face to face with the art of Antiquity. There, among pagan sarcophagi turned into Christian tombs, with heraldic devices chiselled on their arabesques and vizored helmets surmounting their garlands, the great unsigned artist of the fourteenth century, Orcagna of Florence, or Lorenzetti of Siena, painted the typical masterpiece of mediæval art, the great fresco of the Triumph of Death. With wonderful

realization of character and situation he painted the prosperous of the world, the dapper youths and damsels seated with dogs and falcons beneath the orchard trees, amusing themselves with Decameronian tales and sound of lute and psaltery, unconscious of the colossal scythe wielded by the gigantic dishevelled the scythe wielded by the dishevelled angel of Death, and which, in a second, will descend and mow them to the ground ; while the crowd of beggars, ragged, maimed, paralyzed, leprous, grovelling on their withered limbs, see and implore Death, and cry stretching forth their arms, their stumps, and their crutches. Further on, three kings in embroidered robes and gold-trimmed shovel caps, Lewis the Emperor, Ugucione of Pisa, and Castruccio of Lucca, with their retinue of ladies and squires, and hounds and hawks, are riding quietly through a wood. Suddenly their horses stop, draw back ; the Emperor's bay stretches out his long neck sniffing the air ; the kings strain forward to see, one holding his nose for the stench of death which meets him ; and before them are three open coffins, in which lie, in three loathsome stages of corruption, from blue and bloated putrescence to well-nigh fleshless decay, three kingly corpses. This is the triumph of Death ; the grim and consolatory jest of the Middle Ages : equality in decay ; kings, emperors, ladies, knights, beggars, and cripples, this is what we all come to be, stinking corpses ; Death, our lord, our only just and lasting sovereign, reigns impartially over all.

But opposite, all along the sides of the painted cloister, the Amazons are wrestling with the youths on the stone of the sarcophagi; the chariots are dashing forward, the Tritons are splashing in the marble waves; the Maenads are striking their timbrels in their dance with the satyrs; the birds are pecking at the grapes, the goats are nibbling at the vines; all is life, strong and splendid in its marble eternity. And the mutilated Venus smiles towards the broken Hermes; the stalwart Hercules, resting against his club, looks on quietly, a smile beneath his beard; and the gods murmur to each other, as they stand in the cloister filled with earth from Calvary, where hundreds of men lie rotting beneath the cypresses, "Death will not triumph for ever; our day will come."

We have all seen them opposite to each other, these two arts, the art born of Antiquity and the art born of the Middle Ages; but whether this meeting was friendly or hostile or merely indifferent, is a question of constant dispute. To some, mediæval art has appeared being led, Dante-like, by a magician Virgil through the mysteries of nature up to a Christian Beatrice, who alone knows the paths of the kingdom of heaven; others have seen mediæval art, like some strong, chaste Sir Guyon turning away resolutely from the treacherous sorceress of Antiquity, and pursuing solitarily the road to the true and the good; for some the antique has been an impure goddess Venus, seducing and corrupting the Christian artist; the

antique has been for others a glorious Helen, an unattainable perfection, pursued forever by the mediæval craftsman, but seized by him only as a phantom. Magician or witch ; voluptuous, destroying Venus or cold and ungrasped Helen ; what was the antique to this art born of the Middle Ages and developed during the Renaissance ? Was the relation between them that of tuition, cool and abstract ; of fruitful love ; or of deluding and damning example ?

The art which came to maturity in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was generated in the early mediæval revival. The seeds may, indeed, have come down from Antiquity, but they remained for nearly a thousand years hidden in the withered, rotting remains of former vegetation ; and it was not till that vegetation had completely decomposed and become part of the soil, it was not till putrefaction had turned into germination, that artistic organism timidly reappeared. The new art-germ developed with the new civilization which surrounded it. Manufacture and commerce reappeared : the artizans and merchants formed into communities ; the communities grew into towns, the towns into cities. In the city arose the cathedral ; the Lombard or Byzantine mouldings and traceries of the cathedral gave birth to figure-sculpture ; its mosaics gave birth to painting ; every forward movement of the civilization unfolded as it were a new form or detail of the art, until, when mediæval civilization was reaching its moment of

consolidation, when the cathedrals of Lucca and Pisa stood completed, when Niccolò and Giovanni Pisano had sculptured their pulpits and sepulchres ; painting, in the hands of Cimabue and Duccio, of Giotto and of Guido da Siena, freed itself from the tradition of the mosaicists as sculpture had freed itself from the practice of the stone-masons, and stood forth an independent and organic art.

Thus painting was born of a new civilization, and grew by its own vital force ; a thing of the Middle Ages, original and spontaneous. But contemporaneous with the mediæval revival was the resuscitation of Antiquity ; in proportion as the new civilization developed, the old civilization was exhumed ; real Latin began to be studied only when real Italian began to be written ; Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio were at once the founders of modern literature and the exponents of the literature of Antiquity ; the strong young Present was to profit by the experience of the Past.

As it was with literature, so it likewise was with art. The most purely mediæval sculpture, the sculpture which has, as it were, just detached itself from the capitals and porches of the cathedral, is the direct pupil of the antique ; and the three great Gothic sculptors, Niccolò, Giovanni, and Andrea of Pisa, learn from fragments of Greek and Roman sculpture how to model the figure of the Redeemer and how to drape the robe of our Lady. This spontaneous

mediæval sculpture, aided by the antique, preceded by a full half-century the appearance of mediæval painting ; and thanks to the study of the works of the Pisan sculptors that Cimabue and Giotto learned to depart from the mummified monstrosities of the hieratic Byzantine and Roman style of Giunta and Berlinghieri. Thus, through the sculpture of the Pisans the painting of the school of Giotto received at second-hand the teachings of Antiquity. Sculpture had created painting ; painting now belonged to the painters. In the hands of Giotto it developed within a few years into an art which seemed almost mature, an art dealing victoriously with its materials, triumphantly solving its problems, executing as if by miracle all that was demanded of it. But Giottesque art appeared perfect merely because it was limited ; it did all that was required of it, because the required was little ; it was not asked to reproduce the real nor to represent the beautiful ; it was asked merely to suggest a character, a situation, a story.

The artistic development of a nation has its parallel in the artistic development of an individual. The child uses his pencil to tell a story, satisfied with balls and sticks as body, head, and legs, provided he and his friends can associate with them the ideas in their minds. The youth sets himself to copy what he sees, to reproduce forms and effects, without any aim beyond the mere pleasure of copying. The mature

artist strives to obtain forms and effects of which he approves; he seeks for beauty. In the life of Italian painting the generation of men who flourished at the beginning of the sixteenth century are the mature artists; the men of the fifteenth century are the inexperienced youths; the Giottesques are the children—children Titanic and seraph-like, but children nevertheless; and, like all children, learning more perhaps in their few years than can the youth and the man learn in a lifetime.

Like the child, the Giottesque painter wished to show a situation or illustrate a story, and for this purpose the absolute realization of objects was unnecessary. Giottesque art is not incorrect art, it is generalized art; it is an art of mere outline. The Giottesques could draw with great accuracy the hand: the form of the fingers, the bend of the limb, they could give to perfection its whole gesture and movement, they could produce a correct and spirited outline; but within this correct outline marked off in dark paint, there is but a vague, uniform mass of pale colour; the body of the hand is missing, and there remains only its ghost, visible indeed, but unsubstantial, without weight or warmth, eluding the grasp. The difference between this spectre hand of the Giottesques, and the sinewy, muscular hand which can shake and crush of Masaccio and Signorelli; or the soft hand with throbbing pulse and warm pressure of Perugino and Bellini,—this difference is typical of the difference between the art

of the fourteenth century and the art of the fifteenth century : the first suggests, the second realizes ; the one gives impalpable outlines, the other gives tangible bodies. The Giottesque cares for the figure only inasmuch as it displays an action ; he reduces it to a semblance, a phantom, to the mere exponent of an idea ; the man of the Renaissance cares for the figure inasmuch as it is a living organism, he gives it substance and makes it stand out as an animate reality. Thence, despite its early triumphs, the Giottesque style, by its inherent nature, forbade any progress ; it reached its limits at once, and the followers of Giotto look almost as if they were his predecessors, for the simple reason that, being unable to advance, they were forced to retrograde. The limited amount of artistic realization required to present to the mind of the spectator a situation or an allegory, had been obtained by Giotto himself, and bequeathed by him to his followers ; who, finding it more than sufficient for their purposes, and having no love of form and reality for their own sake as an incentive to further acquisition, worked on with their master's materials, composing and recomposing, but adding nothing of their own. Giotto had observed Nature with passionate interest, because, although its representation was only a means to an end, it was a means which required to be mastered ; and as such became in itself a sort of secondary aim ; but the followers of Giotto merely utilized his observations

of Nature, and in so doing gradually conventionalized and debased these second-hand observations. Giotto's forms are wilfully incomplete, because they aim at mere suggestion, but they are not conventional: they are diagrams, not symbols, and thence it is that Giotto seems nearer to the Renaissance than do his latest followers, not excepting even Orcagna. Painting, which had made the most prodigious strides from Giunta to Cimabue, and from Cimabue to Giotto, had got enclosed within a vicious circle, in which it moved for nearly a century neither backwards nor forwards: painters were satisfied with suggestion; and as long as they were satisfied, no progress was possible.

From this Giottesque treadmill, painting was released by the intervention of another art. The painters were hopelessly mediocre; their art was snatched from them by the sculptors. Orcagna himself, perhaps the only Giottesque who gave painting an onward push, had modelled and cast one of the bronze gates of the Florence baptistery; the generation of artists who arose at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and who opened the period of the Renaissance, were sculptors or pupils of sculptors. When we see these vigorous lovers of nature, these heroic searchers after truth, suddenly pushing aside the decrepit Giottesque allegory-mongers, we ask ourselves in astonishment whence they have arisen, and how those broken-down artists of effete art could have begotten such a generation of giants. Whence do they come? Certainly

not from the studios of the Giottesques. No, they issue out of the workshops of the stone-mason, of the goldsmith, of the worker in bronze, of the sculptor. Vasari has preserved the tradition that Masolino and Paolo Uccello were apprentices of Ghiberti ; he has remarked that their greatest contemporary, Masaccio, "trod in the steps of Brunelleschi and of Donatello." Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio we know to have been equally excellent as painters and as workers in bronze. Sculpture, at once more naturalistic and more constantly under the influence of the antique, had for the second time laboured for painting. Itself a subordinate art, without much vitality, without deep roots in the civilization, sculpture was destined to remain the unsuccessful pupil of the antique, and the unsuccessful rival of painting ; but sculpture had for its mission to prepare the road for painting and to prepare painting for antique influence ; and the noblest work of Ghiberti and Donatello was Masaccio, as the most lasting glory to the Pisani had been Giotto.

With Masaccio began the study of nature for its own sake, the desire of reproducing external objects without any regard to their significance as symbols or as parts of a story ; the passionate wish to arrive at absolute realization. The merely suggestive outline art of the Giottesques had come to an end ; the suggestion became a matter of indifference, the realization became a paramount interest ; the story was forgotten in the telling, the religious thought was

lost in the search for the artistic form. The Giottesques had used debased conventionalism to represent action with wonderful narrative and logical power; the artists of the early Renaissance became unskilful narrators and foolish allegorists almost in proportion as they became skilful draughtsmen and colourists; the saints had become to Masaccio merely so many lay figures on to which to cast drapery; for Fra Filippo the Madonna was a mere peasant model; for Filippino Lippi and for Ghirlandajo, a miracle meant merely an opportunity of congregating a number of admirable portrait figures in the dress of the day; the Baptism for Verrocchio had significance only as a study of muscular legs and arms; and the sacrifice of Noah had no importance for Uccello save as a grand opportunity for foreshortenings. In the hands of the Giottesques, interested in the subject and indifferent to the representation, painting had remained stationary for eighty years; for eighty years did it develop in the hands of the men of the fifteenth century, indifferent to the subject and passionately interested in the representation. The unity, the appearance of comparative perfection of the art had disappeared with the limits within which the Giottesques had been satisfied to move; instead of the intelligible and solemn conventionalism of the Giottesques, we see only disorder, half-understood ideas and abortive attempts, confusion which reminds us of those enigmatic sheets on which Leonardo or Michael Angelo

scrawled out their ideas—drawings within drawings, plans of buildings scratched over Madonna heads, single flowers upside down next to flayed arms, calculations, monsters, sonnets; a very chaos of thoughts and of shapes, in which the plan of the artist is inextricably lost, which mean everything and nothing, but out of whose unintelligible network of lines and curves have issued masterpieces, and which only the foolish or the would-be philosophical would exchange for some intelligible, hopelessly finished and finite illustration out of a Bible or a book of travels.

Anatomy, perspective, colour, drapery, effects of light, of water, of shadow, forms of trees and flowers, converging lines of architecture, all this at once absorbed and distracted the attention of the artists of the early Renaissance; and while they studied, copied, and calculated, another thought began to haunt them, another eager desire began to pursue them: by the side of Nature, the manifold, the baffling, the bewildering, there rose up before them another divinity, another sphinx, mysterious in its very simplicity and serenity—the Antique.

The exhumation of the antique had, as we have seen, been contemporaneous with the birth of painting; nay, the study of the remains of antique sculpture had, in contributing to form Niccolò Pisano, indirectly helped to form Giotto; the very painter of the Triumph of Death had inserted into his terrible fresco two-winged genii, upholding a scroll, copied without any

alteration from some coarse Roman sarcophagus, in which they may have sustained the usual *Dis Manibus Sacrum*. There had been, on the part of both sculptors and painters, a constant study of the antique ; but during the Giottesque period this study had been limited to technicalities, and had in no way affected the conception of art. The mediæval artists, surrounded by physical deformities, and seeing sanctity in sickness and dirt, little accustomed to observe the human figure, were incapable, both as men and as artists, of at all entering into the spirit of antique art. They could not perceive the superior beauty of the antique ; they could recognize only its superior science and its superior handicraft, and these alone they studied to obtain.

Giovanni Pisano sculpturing the unfleshed, caried carcasses of the devils who leer, writhe, crunch, and tear on the outside of Orvieto Cathedral ; and the Giottesques painting those terrible green, macerated Christs, hanging livid and broken from the cross which abound in Tuscany and Umbria ; the artists who produced these loathsome and lugubrious works were indubitably students of the antique ; but they had learned from it not a love for beautiful form and noble drapery, but merely the general shape of the limbs and the general fall of the garments : the anatomical science and technical processes of Antiquity were being used to produce the most intensely un-antique, the most intensely mediæval works. Thus

matters stood in the time of Giotto. His followers, who studied only arrangement, probably consulted the antique as little as they consulted nature; but the contemporary sculptors were brought by the very constitution of their art into close contact both with Nature and with the antique; they studied both with determination, and handed over the results of their labours to the sculptor-taught painters of the fifteenth century.

Here, then, were the two great factors in the art of the Renaissance—the study of nature, and the study of the Antique: both understood slowly, imperfectly; the one counteracting the effect of the other; the study of nature now scaring away all antique influence, the study of the antique now distorting all imitation of nature; rival forces confusing the artist and marring the work, until, when each could receive its due, the one corrected the other, and they combined, producing by this marriage of the living reality with the dead but immortal beauty, the great art of Michael Angelo, of Raphael, and of Titian: double, like its origin, antique and modern, real and ideal.

The study of the antique is thus placed opposite to the study of nature, the comprehension of the works of Antiquity is the momentary antagonist of the comprehension of the works of nature. And this may seem strange, when we consider that antique art was itself due to perfect comprehension of nature. But the contradiction is easily explained. The study

of nature, as it was carried on in the Renaissance, comprised the study of effects which had remained unnoticed by Antiquity ; and the study of the statue, colourless, without light, shade, or perspective, hampered, and was hampered by, the study of colour, of light and shade, of perspective, and of all that a generation of painters would seek to learn from nature. Nor was this all ; the influence of the civilization of the Renaissance, of a civilization directly issued from the Middle Ages, was entirely at variance with the influence of antique civilization through the medium of ancient art ; the Middle Ages and Antiquity, Christianity and Paganism, were even more opposed to each other than could be the statue and the easel picture, the fresco and the bas-relief.

First, then, we have the hostility between painting and sculpture, between the *modus operandi* of the modern and the *modus operandi* of the ancient art. Antique art is, in the first place, purely linear art, colourless, tintless, without light and shade ; next, it is essentially the art of the isolated figure, without background, grouping, or perspective. As linear art it could directly affect only that branch of painting which was itself linear ; and as art of the isolated figure it was ever being contradicted by the constantly developing arts of perspective and landscape. The antique never directly influenced the Venetians, not from reasons of geography and culture, but from the fact that Venetian painting, founded from the

earliest times upon a system of colour, could not be affected by antique sculpture, based upon a system of modelled, colourless form ; the men who saw form only through the medium of colour could not learn much from purely linear form ; hence it is that even after a certain amount of antique imitation had passed into Venetian painting, through the medium of Mantegna, the Venetian painters display comparatively little antique influence. In Bellini, Carpaccio, Cima, and other early masters, the features, forms, and dress are mainly modern and Venetian ; and Giorgione, Titian, and even the eclectic Tintoret, were more interested in the bright lights of a steel breastplate than in the shape of a limb ; and preferred in their hearts a shot brocade of the sixteenth century to the finest drapery ever modelled by an ancient.

The antique influence was naturally strongest among the Tuscan schools ; because the Tuscan schools were essentially schools of drawing, and the draughtsman recognized in antique sculpture the highest perfection of that linear form which was his own domain. Yet while the antique appealed most to the linear schools, even in these it could strongly influence only the purely linear part ; it is strong in the drawings and weak in the paintings. As long as the artists had only the pencil or pen, they could reproduce much of the linear perfection of the antique ; they were, so to speak, alone with it ; but as soon as they brought in colour, perspective, and scenery, the

linear perfection was lost in attempts at something new ; the antique was put to flight by the modern. Botticelli's crayon study for his Venus is almost antique ; his tempera picture of Venus, with the pale blue scaly sea, the laurel grove, the flower-embroidered garments, the wisps of tawny hair, is comparatively mediæval ; Pinturicchio's sketch of Pans and satyrs contrasts strangely with his frescoes in the library of Siena ; Mantegna himself, supernaturally antique in his engravings, becomes comparatively trivial and modern in his oil-paintings. Do what they might, draw from the antique and calculate its proportions, the artists of the Renaissance found themselves baffled as soon as they attempted to apply the result of their linear studies to coloured pictures ; as soon as they tried to make the antique unite with the modern, one of the two elements was sure to succumb. In Botticelli, draughtsman and student though he was, the modern, the mediæval, that part of the art which had arisen in the Middle Ages, invariably had the upper hand ; his Venus, despite her forms studied from the antique and her gesture imitated from some earlier discovered copy of the Medicean Venus, has the woe-begone prudery of a Madonna or of an abbess ; she shivers physically and morally in her unaccustomed nakedness, and the goddess of Spring, who comes skipping up from beneath the laurel copse, does well to prepare her a mantle, for in the pallid tempera colour, against the dismal background of rippled sea,

this mediæval Venus, at once indecent and prudish, is no very pleasing sight. In the Allegory of Spring in the Academy of Florence, we again have the antique ; goddesses and nymphs whose clinging garments the gentle Sandro Botticelli has assuredly studied from some old statue of Agrippina or Faustina ; but what strange livid tints are there beneath those draperies, what eccentric gestures are those of the nymphs, what a green, ghostlike light illumines this garden of Venus ! Are these goddesses and nymphs immortal women such as the ancients conceived, or are they not rather fantastic fairies or nixen, Titanias and Undines, incorporeal daughters of dew and gossamer and mist ?

In Sandro Botticelli the teachings of the statue are forgotten or distorted when the artist takes up his palette and brushes ; in his greater contemporary, Andrea Mantegna, the ever-present antique chills and arrests the vitality of the modern. Mantegna, the pupil of the ancient marbles of Squarcione's workshop even more than the pupil of Donatello, studies for his paintings not from nature, but from sculpture ; his figures are seen in strange projection and foreshortening, like figures in a high relief seen from below ; despite his mastery of perspective, they seem hewn out of the background ; despite the rich colours which he displays in his Veronese altar-piece, they look like painted marbles, with their hard clots of stonelike hair and beard, with their vacant glance and their wonderful draperies, clinging and weighty like the

wet draperies of ancient sculpture. They are beautiful petrifications, or vivified statues; Mantegna's masterpiece, the sepia "Judith" in Florence, is like an exquisite, pathetically lovely Eurydice, who has stepped unconscious and lifeless out of a Praxitelian bas-relief. And there are stranger works than even the Judith; strange statuesque fancies, like the fight of Marine Monsters and the Bacchanal among Mantegna's engravings. The group of three wondrous creatures, at once men, fish, and gods, is as grand and even more fantastic than Leonardo's Battle of the Standard: a Triton, sturdy and muscular, with sea-weed beard and hair, wheels round his finned horse, preparing to strike his adversary with a bunch of fish which he brandishes above him; on him is rushing, careering on an osseous sea-horse, a strange, lank, sinewy being, fury stretching every tendon, his long-clawed feet striking into the flanks of his steed, his sharp, reed-crowned head turned fiercely, with clenched teeth, on his opponent, and stretching forth a truncheon, ready to run down his enemy as a ship runs down another; and further off a young Triton, with clotted hair and heavy eyes, seems ready to sink wounded below the rippling wavelets, with the massive head and marble agony of the dying Alexander; enigmatic figures, grand and grotesque, lean, haggard, vehement, and yet, in the midst of violence and monstrosity, unaccountably antique. The other print, called the Bacchanal, has no background: half a dozen male

figures stand separate and naked as in a bas-relief. Some are leaning against a vine-wreathed tub ; a satyr, with acanthus-leaves growing wondrously out of him, half man, half plant, is emptying a cup ; a heavy Silenus is prone upon the ground ; a faun, seated upon the vat, is supporting in his arms a beautiful sinking youth ; another youth, grand, muscular, and grave as a statue, stands on the further side. Is this really a bacchanal ? Yes, for there is the paunchy Silenus, there are the fauns, there the vat and vine-wreaths and drinking-horns. And yet it cannot be a bacchanal. Compare with it one of Rubens's orgies, where the overgrown, rubicund men and women and fauns tumble about in tumultuous, riotous intoxication : that is a bacchanal ; they have been drinking, those magnificent brutes, there is wine firing their blood and weighing down their heads. But here all is different, in this so-called Bacchanal of Mantegna. This heavy Silenus is supine like a mass of marble ; these fauns are shy and mute ; these youths are grave and sombre ; there is no wine in the cups, there are no lees in the vat, there is no life in these magnificent colossal forms ; there is no blood in their grandly bent lips, no light in their wide-opened eyes ; it is not the drowsiness of intoxication which is weighing down the youth sustained by the faun ; it is no grape-juice which gives that strange, vague glance. No ; they have drunk, but not of any mortal drink ; the grapes are grown in Persephone's garden, the vat con-

tains no fruits that have ripened beneath our sun. These strange, mute, solemn revellers have drunk of Lethe, and they are growing cold with the cold of death and of marble ; they are the ghosts of the dead ones of antiquity, revisiting the artist of the Renaissance, who paints them, thinking he is painting life, while that which he paints is in reality death.

This anomaly, this unsatisfactory character of the works of both Botticelli and Mantegna, is mainly technical ; the antique is frustrated in Botticelli, not so much by the Christian, the mediæval, the modern mode of feeling, as by the new methods and aims of the new art which disconcert the methods and aims of the old art ; and that which arrests Mantegna in his development as a painter is not the spirit of Paganism deadening the spirit of Christianity, but the laws of sculpture hampering painting. But this technical contest between two arts, the one not yet fully developed, the other not yet fully understood, is as nothing compared with the contest between the two civilizations, the antique and the modern ; between the habits and tendencies of the contemporaries of the artists of the Renaissance and of the artists themselves, and the habits and tendencies of the antique artists and their contemporaries. We are apt to think of the Renaissance as of a period closely resembling antiquity, misled by the inevitable similarity between southern and democratic countries of whatever age ; misled still less pardonably by the Ciceronian pedan-

tries and pseudo-antique obscenities of a few humanists, and by the pseudo-Corinthian arabesques and capitals of a few learned architects. But all this was mere archæological finery borrowed by a civilization in itself entirely unlike that of ancient Greece.

The Renaissance, let us remember, was merely the flowering time of that great mediæval movement which had germinated early in the twelfth century ; it was merely a more advanced stage of the civilization which had produced Dante and Giotto, of the civilization which was destined to produce Luther and Rabelais. The fifteenth century was merely the continuation of the fourteenth century, as the fourteenth had been of the thirteenth ; there had been growth and improvement ; development of the more modern, diminishing of the more mediæval elements ; but, despite growth and the changes due to growth, the Renaissance was part and parcel of the Middle Ages. The life, thought, aspirations, and habits were mediæval ; opposed to the open-air life, the physical training and the materialistic religion of Antiquity. The surroundings of Masaccio and of Signorelli, nay, even of Raphael, were very different from those of Phidias or Praxiteles. Let us think what were the daily and hourly impressions given by the Renaissance to its artists. Large towns, in which thousands of human beings were crowded together, in narrow, gloomy streets, with but a strip of blue visible between the projecting roofs ; and in these cities an incessant

commercial activity, with no relief save festivals at the churches, brawls at the taverns, and carnival buffooneries. Men and women pale and meagre for want of air, and light, and movement; undeveloped, untrained bodies, warped by constant work at the loom or at the desk, at best with the lumpish freedom of the soldier and the vulgar nimbleness of the 'prentice. And these men and women dressed in the dress of the Middle Ages, gorgeous perhaps in colour, but heavy, miserable, grotesque, nay, sometimes ludicrous in form; citizens in lumpish robes and long-tailed caps; ladies in stiff and foldless brocade hoops and stomachers; artizans in striped and close-adhering hose and egg-shaped padded jerkin; soldiers in lumbering armour-plates, ill-fitted over ill-fitting leather, a shapeless shell of iron, bulging out and angular, in which the body was buried as successfully as in the robes of the magistrates. Thus we see the men and women of the Renaissance in the works of all its painters: heavy in Ghirlandajo, vulgarly jaunty in Filippino, preposterously starched and prim in Mantegna, ludicrously undignified in Signorelli; while mediæval stiffness, awkwardness, and absurdity reach their acme perhaps in the little boys, companions of the Medici children, introduced into Benozzo Gozzoli's Building of Babel. These are the prosperous town-folk, among whom the Renaissance artist is but too glad to seek for models; but besides these there are lamentable sights, mediæval beyond words, at every

street corner: dwarfs and cripples, maimed and diseased beggars of all degrees of loathsomeness, lepers and epileptics, and infinite numbers of monks, brown, grey, and black, in sack-shaped frocks and pointed hoods, with shaven crown and cropped beard, emaciated with penance or bloated with gluttony. And all this the painter sees, daily, hourly; it is his standard of humanity, and as such finds its way into every picture. It is the living; but opposite it arises the dead. Let us turn aside from the crowd of the mediæval city, and look at what the workmen have just laid bare, or what the merchant has just brought from Rome or from Greece. Look at this: it is corroded by oxides, battered by ill-usage, stained with earth: it is not a group, not even a whole statue, it has neither head nor arms remaining; it is a mere broken fragment of antique sculpture,—a naked body with a fold or two of drapery; it is not by Phidias nor by Praxiteles, it may not even be Greek; it may be some cheap copy, made for a garden or a bath, in the days of Hadrian. But to the artist of the fifteenth century it is the revelation of a whole world, a world in itself. We can scarcely realize all this; but let us look and reflect, and even we may feel as must have felt the man of the Renaissance in the presence of that mutilated, stained, battered torso. He sees in that broken stump a grandeur of outline, a magnificence of osseous structure, a breadth of muscle and sinew, a smooth, firm covering of flesh, such as he

would vainly seek in any of his living models ; he sees a delicate and infinite variety of indentures, of projections, of creases following the bend of every limb ; he sees, where the surface still exists intact, an elasticity of skin, a buoyancy of hidden life such as all the colours of his palette are unable to imitate ; and in this piece of drapery, negligently gathered over the hips or rolled upon the arm, he sees a magnificent alternation of large folds and small plaits, of straight lines, and broken lines, and curves. He sees all this ; but he sees more : the broken torso is, as we have said, not merely a world in itself, but the revelation of a world. It is the revelation of antique civilization, of the palæstra and the stadium, of the sanctification of the body, of the apotheosis of man, of the religion of life and nature and joy ; revealed to the man of the Middle Ages, who has hitherto seen in the untrained, diseased, despised body but a deformed piece of baseness, which his priests tell him belongs to the worms and to Satan ; who has been taught that the monk living in solitude and celibacy, filthy, sick, worn out with fastings and bleeding with flagellation, is the nearest approach to divinity ; who has seen Divinity itself, pale, emaciated, joyless, hanging bleeding from the cross ; and who is for ever reminded that the kingdom of this Godhead is not of this world.

What passes in the mind of that artist ? What surprise, what dawning doubts, what sickening fears, what longings and what remorse are not the fruit of

this sight of Antiquity? Is he to yield or to resist? Is he to forget the saints and Christ, and give himself over to Satan and to Antiquity? Only one man boldly answered, Yes. Mantegna abjured his faith, abjured the Middle Ages, abjured all that belonged to his time; and in so doing cast away from him the living art and became the lover, the worshipper of shadows. And only one man turned completely aside from the antique as from the demon, and that man was a saint, Fra Angelico da Fiesole. And with the antique, Fra Angelico rejected all the other artistic influences and aims of his time, the time not of Giotto or of Orcagna, but of Masaccio and Uccello, of Pollaiuolo and Donatello. For the mild, meek, angelic monk dreaded the life of his days; dreaded to leave the flower-beds of his cloister where the sunshine was tempered and the noise reduced to a mere faint hum; dreaded to soil or rumple his spotless white robe and his shining black cowl; a spiritual sybarite, shrinking from the sight of the crowd seething in the streets, shrinking from the idea of stripping the rags off the beggar in order to see his tanned and gnarled limbs; shuddering at the thought of seeking for muscles in the dead, cut-open body; fearful of every whiff of life that might mingle with the incense atmosphere of his chapel, of every cry of human passion which might break through the well-ordered sweetness of his chants. No; the Renaissance did not exist for him who lived in a world of diaphanous form, colour

and character, unsubstantial and unruffled ; dreaming feebly of transparent-checked Madonnas with no limbs beneath their robes ; of smooth-faced saints with well-combed beard and vacant, sweet gaze, seated in well-ordered masses, holy with the purity of inanity ; and of divine dolls with flaxen locks, floating between heaven and earth, playing upon lute and viol and psaltery ; raised to faint visions of angels and blessed, moving noiseless, feelingless, meaningless, across the flowerets of Paradise ; of assemblies of saints, arrayed in pure pink, and blue and lilac, seated in the glory of an atmosphere of liquid gold. And thus Fra Anglico worked on, content with the dearly purchased science of his masters, placid, beatic, effeminate, in an æsthetical paradise of his own, a paradise of sloth and sweetness, a paradise for weak souls, weak hearts, and weak eyes ; patiently repeating the same fleshless angels, the same boneless saints, the same bloodless virgins ; happy in smoothing the unmixed, unshaded tints of sky, and earth, and dresses ; laying on the gold of the fretted heavens, and of the iridescent wings, embroidering robes, instruments of music, halos, flowers, with threads of gold. . . . Sweet, simple artist saint, reducing art to something akin to the delicate pearl and silk embroidery of pious nuns, to the exquisite sweetmeat cookery of pious monks ; a something too delicately gorgeous, too deliciously insipid for human wear or human food ; no, the Renaissance does not exist for thee, either in

its study of the existing reality, or in its study of antique beauty.

Mantegna, the learned, the archæological, the pagan, who renounces his times and his faith; and Angelico, the monk, the saint, who bolts his monastery doors and sprinkles holy water in the face of the antique; the two extremes, are both exceptions. The innumerable artists of the Renaissance remained in hesitation; tried to court both the antique and the modern, to unite the Pagan and the Christian—some, like Ghirlandajo, in cold indifference to all but mere artistic science, encrusting marble bacchanals into the walls of the Virgin's paternal house, bringing together, unthinkingly, antique-draped women carrying baskets and noble Strozzi and Rucellai ladies with gloved hands folded over their gold brocaded skirts; others, with cheerful and childlike pleasure in both antique and modern, like Benozzo, crowding together half-naked youths and nymphs treading the grapes and scaling the trellise with Florentine magnificos in plaited skirts and starched collars, among the pines and porticos, the sprawling children, barking dogs, peacocks sunning themselves, and partridges picking up grain, of his Pisan frescoes; yet others using the antique as mere pageant shows, allegorical mummeries destined to amuse some Duke of Ferrara or Marquis of Mantua, together with the hurdle races of Jews, hags, and riderless donkeys.

Thus little by little the antique amalgamates with

the modern ; the art born of the Middle Ages absorbs the art born of Paganism ; but how slowly, and with what fantastic and ludicrous results at first ; as when the anatomical sculptor Pollaiolo gives scenes of naked Roman prize-fighters as martyrdoms of St. Sebastian ; or when the pious Perugino (pious at least with his brush) dresses up his sleek, hectic, beardless archangels as Roman warriors, and makes them stand, straddling beatifically on thin little dapper legs, wistfully gazing from beneath their wondrously ornamented helmets on the walls of the Cambio at Perugia ; when he masquerades meditative fathers of the Church as Socrates and haggard anchorites as Numa Pompilius ; most ludicrous of all, when he attires in scantiest of clinging antique drapery his mild and pensive Madonnas, and, with daintily pointed toes, places them to throne bashfully on allegorical chariots as Venus or Diana.

Long is the period of amalgamation, and small are the results throughout that long early Renaissance. Mantegna, Piero della Francesca, Melozzo, Ghirlandajo, Filippino, Botticelli, Verrocchio, have none of them shown us the perfect fusion of the two elements whose union is to give us Michael Angelo, Raphael, and all the great perfect artists of the early sixteenth century ; the two elements are for ever ill-combined and hostile to each other ; the modern vulgarizes the antique, the antique paralyzes the modern. And meanwhile the fifteenth century, the century of study,

of conflict, and of confusion, is rapidly drawing to a close ; eight or ten more years, and it will be gone. Is the new century to find the antique still dead and the modern still mediæval ?

The antique and the modern had met for the first time and as irreconcilable enemies in the cloisters of Pisa ; and the modern had triumphed in the great mediæval fresco of the Triumph of Death. By a strange coincidence, by a sublime jest of accident, the antique and the modern were destined to meet again, and this time indissolubly united, in a painting representing the Resurrection. Yes, Signorelli's fresco in Orvieto Cathedral is indeed a resurrection, the resurrection of human beauty after the long death-slumber of the Middle Ages. And the artist would seem to have been dimly conscious of the great allegory he was painting. Here and there are strewn skulls ; skeletons stand leering by, as if in remembrance of the ghastly past, and as a token of former death ; but magnificent youths are breaking through the crust of the earth, emerging, taking shape and flesh ; arising, strong and proud, ready to go forth at the bidding of the Titanic angels who announce from on high with trumpet blast and waving banners, that the death of the world has come to an end, and that mankind has arisen once more in the youth and beauty of Antiquity.

## II.

Signorelli's frescoes at Orvieto, at once the latest works of the fifteenth century, and the latest works of an old man nurtured in the traditions of Benozzo Gozzoli and of Piero della Francesca, mark the beginning of the maturity of Italian art. From them Michael Angelo learns what he could not be taught even by his master Ghirlandajo, the grand and cold realist. He learns ; and what he has learned at Orvieto he teaches with re-doubled force in Rome ; and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the heroic nudities, the majestic draperies, the reappearance in the modern art of painting of the spirit and hand of Phidias, give a new impulse and hasten on perfection. When the doors of the chapel are at length opened, Raphael forgets Perugino ; Fra Bartolomeo forgets Botticelli ; Sodoma forgets Leonardo ; the narrower hesitating styles of the fifteenth century are abandoned, as the great example is disseminated throughout Italy ; and even the tumult of angels in glory which the Lombard Correggio is to paint in far-off Parma, and the daringly simple Bacchus and Ariadne with which Tintoret will decorate the Ducal Palace more than fifty years later—all that is great and bold, all that is a re-incarnation of the spirit of Antiquity, all that marks the culmination of Renaissance art, seems due to the impulse of Michael Angelo, and, through him, to the example of Signorelli. From

the celestial horseman and bounding avenging angels of Raphael's Heliodorus, to the St. Sebastian of Sodoma, with exquisite limbs and head, rich with tendril-like locks, delicate against the brown Umbrian sunset ; from the Madonna of Andrea del Sarto seated, with the head and drapery of a Niobe, by the sack of flour in the Annunziata cloister, to the voluptuous goddess, with purple mantle half concealing her body of golden white, who leans against the sculptured fountain in Titian's Sacred and Profane Love, with the greenish blue sky and hazy light of evening behind her ; from the extremest examples of the most extreme schools of Lombardy and Venetia, to the most intense examples of the remotest schools of Tuscany and Umbria ; throughout the art of the early sixteenth century, of those thirty years which were the years of perfection, we see, more or less marked, but always distinct, the union of the living art born of the Middle Ages with the dead art left by Antiquity, a union producing life and perfection, producing the great art of the Renaissance.

This much is clear and easy of definition ; but what is neither clearly understood nor easily defined is the manner in which the antique and the modern did thus amalgamate. It is easy to speak of a vague union of spirit, of the antique idea having permeated the modern ; but all this explains but little : art is not a metaphysical figment, and all its phases and revolutions are concrete, and, so to speak,

physically explicable and definable. The union of the antique with the modern meant simply the absorption by the art of the Renaissance of elements of civilization necessary for its perfection, but not existing in the mediæval civilization of the fifteenth century ; of elements of civilization which gave what the civilization of the fifteenth century—which could give colour, perspective, grouping, and landscape—could never have afforded : the nude, drapery, and gesture.

The naked human body, which the Greeks had trained, studied, and idolized, did not exist in the fifteenth century ; in its stead there was only the undressed body, ill-developed, untrained, pinched, and distorted by the garments only just cast off ; cramped and bent by sedentary occupations, livid with the plague-spots of the Middle Ages, scarred with the whip-marks of asceticism. This stripped body, unseen and unfit to be seen, unaccustomed to the air and to the eyes of others, shivered and cowered for cold and for shame. The Giottesques ignored its very existence, conceiving humanity as a bodiless creature, with face and hands to express emotion, and just enough malformed legs and feet to be either standing or moving ; further, beneath the garments, there was nothing. The realists of the fifteenth century tore off the clothes and drew the ugly thing beneath ; and bought the corpses from the lazar-houses, and stole them from the gallows ; in order to see how bone fitted into bone, and muscle was stretched over muscle. They learned

to perfection the anatomy of the human frame, but they could not learn its beauty ; they became even reconciled to the ugliness they were accustomed to see ; and, with their minds full of antique examples, Verrocchio, Donatello, Pollaiolo, and Ghirlandajo, the greatest anatomists of the fifteenth century, imitated their coarse and ill-made living models even while imagining that they imitated antique marbles.

So much for the nude. Drapery, as the ancients understood it in the delicate plaits of Greek chiton and chlamys, in the grand folds of Roman toga, the fifteenth century could not show ; it knew only the stiff, scanty raiment of the active classes ; the unshapely masses of lined cloth of the merchants and magistrates ; the prudish and ostentatious starched dress of the women ; and the lumpish garb of the monks.

The artist of the fifteenth century knew drapery only as an exotic ; an exotic with whose representation the habit of seeing mediæval costume was for ever interfering. On the stripped, unseemly, indecent body he places, with the stiffness of artificiality, drapery such as he has never seen upon any living creature ; the result is awkwardness and rigidity. And what attitude, what gesture, can he expect from this stripped and artificially draped model ? None, for the model scarce knows how to stand in so unaccustomed a condition of body. The artist must seek for attitude and gesture among his townfolk, and among them he rarely finds any save trivial, awkward, often vulgar movement.

They have never been taught how to stand or to move with grace and dignity ; and the artist studies attitude and gesture in the market-place or the bull-baiting ground, where Ghirlandajo found his jauntily strutting idlers, and Verrocchio his brutally staggering prize-fighters. Between the constrained attitudinizing of Byzantine and Giottesque tradition, and the imitation of the movements of clodhoppers and ragamuffins, the realist of the fifteenth century would wander hopelessly without the help of the antique. Without it genius and science are of no avail ; the position of Christ in baptism in the paintings of Verrocchio and Ghirlandajo is servile ; the movements of the "Thunder-stricken " in Signorelli's lunettes is a comic mixture of the brutish and the melodramatic ; the magnificently drawn youth at the door of the prison in Filippino's Liberation of St. Peter is gradually going to sleep and collapsing in a fashion which is anything but noble.

And the same applies to sculptured figures or to figures standing isolated like statues ; no Greek would have ventured upon the swaggering position, with legs apart and elbows out, of Donatello's St. George, or Perugino's St. Michael ; and a young Athenian who should have assumed the attitude of Verrocchio's David, with tripping legs and hand clapped on his hip, would have been made to sit in a corner as a saucy little ragamuffin.

Coarse nude, stiff drapery, commonplace attitude, was all that the fifteenth century could offer to its artists ;

but Antiquity could offer more and very different things: the naked body developed by the most artistic training, drapery the most natural and refined, and attitude and gesture regulated by an education the most careful and artistic; and all these things Antiquity did give to the artists of the Renaissance. They did not copy antique statues instead of living naked men and women, but they corrected the faults of their living models by the example of the statues; they did not copy antique stone draperies in coloured pictures, but they arranged the robes on their models with the antique folds well in their memory; they did not give the gestures of statues to living figures, but they made the living figures move in accordance with those principles of harmony which they had found exemplified in the statues.

They did not imitate the antique, they studied it; they obtained through the fragments of antique sculpture a glimpse into the life of antiquity, and that glimpse served to correct the vulgarism and distortion of the mediæval life of the fifteenth century. In the perfection of Italian painting, the union of antique and modern being consummated, it is perhaps difficult to disentangle what really is antique from what is modern; but in the earlier times, when the two elements were still separate, we can see them opposite each other and compare them in the works of the greatest artists. Wherever, as a rule, in the paintings of the early Renaissance, there is realism, marked by the costume of

the times, there is ugliness of form and vulgarity of movement ; where there is idealism, marked by imitation of the antique, the nude, and drapery, there is beauty and dignity. We need only compare Filippino's Scene before the Proconsul with his Raising of the King's Son in the Brancacci Chapel ; the grand attitude and draperies of Ghirlandajo's Zachariah with the ungraceful dress and movements of the Florentine citizens surrounding him ; Benozzo Gozzoli's noble naked figure of Noah with his ungainly, hideously dressed figure of Cosimo de' Medici ; Mantegna's exquisite Judith with his preposterous Marquis of Mantua ; in short, all the purely realistic with all the purely idealistic painting of the fifteenth century. We may give one last instance. In Signorelli's Orvieto frescoes there is a figure of a young man, with aquiline features, long crisp hair and strongly developed throat, which reappears unmistakably in all the compositions, and in some of them twice and thrice in various positions. His naked figure is grand, his attitudes very fine, his thrown-back head superb, whether he be slowly and painfully emerging from the earth, staggered and gasping with his newly infused life, or sinking oppressed on the ground, broken and crushed by the sound of the trumpet of judgment ; or whether he be moving forward with ineffable longing towards the angel about to award him the crown of the blessed ; in all these positions he is heroically beautiful. We meet him again, unmistakable, but how different, in the

realistic group of the "Thunder-stricken"—the long, lank youth, with spindle-shanks and egg-shaped body, bounding forward, with grotesque strides, over the uncouth heap of dead bodies, ungainly masses with soles and nostrils uppermost, lying in beast-like confusion. This youth, with something of a harlequin in his jumps and his ridiculous thin legs and preposterous padded body, is evidently the model for the naked demi-gods of the Resurrection and the Paradise: he is the handsome boy as the fifteenth century gave him to Signorelli; opposite, he is the living youth of the fifteenth century idealized by the study of ancient sculpture; just as the "Thunder-stricken" may be some scene of street massacre such as Signorelli might have witnessed at Cortona or Perugia; while the agonies of the "Hell" are the grouped and rhythmic agonies taught by the antique; just as the two archangels of the "Hell," in their armour of Baglioni's heavy cavalry, may represent the modern element, and the same archangels, naked, with magnificent flying draperies, blowing the trumpets of the Resurrection, may show the antique element in Renaissance art.

The antique influence was not, indeed, equally strong throughout Italy. It was strongest in the Tuscan school, which, seeking for perfection of linear form, found that perfection in the antique; it was weakest in the Lombard and Venetian schools, which sought for what the antique could not give, light and shade and colour. The antique was most efficacious

where it was most indispensable, and it was more necessary to a Tuscan, strong only with his charcoal or pencil, than to Lionardo's Lombards, who could make an imperfect figure, beckoning mysteriously from out of the gloom, more fascinating than the finest drawn Florentine Madonna, and could surround an insignificant head with the wondrous sheen and ripple of hair, as with an aureole of poetry ; it was also less necessary to Giorgione and Titian, who could hide coarse limbs beneath their draperies of precious ruby, and transfigure, by the liquid gold of their palettes, a peasant woman into a goddess. But even the Lombards, even the Venetians, required the antique influence. They could not perhaps have obtained it direct like the Tuscans : the colourists and masters of light and shade might never have understood the blank lines and faint shadows of the marble ; but they received the antique influence, strong but modified by the medium through which it had passed, from Mantegna ; and the relentless self-sacrifice to Antiquity, the self-paralyzation of the great artist, was not without its use : from Venetian Padua, Mantegna influenced the Bellini and Giorgione ; from Lombard Mantua, he influenced Leonardo ; and Mantegna's influence was that of the antique.

What would have been the art of the Renaissance without the antique ? The speculation is vain, for the antique had influenced it, had been goading it on ever since the earliest times ; it had been present at

its birth, it had affected Giotto through Niccolò Pisano, and Masaccio through Ghiberti ; the antique influence cannot be conceived as absent in the history of Italian painting. So far, as a study of the impossible, it would be useless to speculate respecting the fate of Renaissance art if uninfluenced by the antique. But lest we forget that this antique influence did exist, lest, grown ungrateful, we refuse it its immense share in producing Michael Angelo, Raphael, and Titian, we may do well to turn to an art born and bred like Italian art, in the Middle Ages ; like it, full of strength and power of self-development, but which, unlike Italian art, was not directly influenced by the antique. This art is the great German art of the early sixteenth century ; the art of Aldegrever, of Altdorfer, of Wohlgemuth, of Kranach, of Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein, whom they resemble as Pinturicchio and Lo Spagna resemble Perugino, as Palma and Paris Bordone resemble Titian. This is an art born in a civilization less perfect indeed than that of Italy, narrower, as Nürnberg or Basle is narrower than Florence ; but resembling it in habits, dress, religion, above all, the main characteristic of being mediæval ; and its masters, as great as their Italian contemporaries in all the technicalities of the art, and in absolute honesty of endeavour, may show what the Italian art of the sixteenth century might have been without the antique. Let us therefore open a port-

folio of those wonderful minute yet grand engravings of the old Germans. They are for the most part Scriptural scenes or allegories, quite analogous to those of the Italians, but purely realistic, conscious of no world beyond that of an Imperial City of the year 1520. Here we have the whole turn-out, male and female, of a German free-town, in the shape of scenes from the lives of the Virgin and saints ; here are short fat burghers, with enormous blotchy, bloated faces and little eyes set in fat, their huge stomachs protruding from under their jackets ; here are bleary-eyed ladies, tall, thin, wrinkled though not old, with figures like hungry harpies, stalking about in high headgears and stiff gowns, or sitting by the side of lean and stunted pages, singing (with dolorous voice) to lutes ; or promenading under trees with long-shanked, high-shouldered gentlemen, with vacant sickly face and long scraggy hair and beard, their bony elbows sticking out under their slashed doublets. These courtly figures culminate in Dürer's magnificent plate of the wild man of the woods kissing the hideous, leering Jezebel in her brocade and jewels. Even the poor Madonnas, seated in front of village hovels or windmills, smile the smile of starved, sickly sempstresses. It is a stunted, poverty-stricken, plague-sick, society, this mediæval society of burghers and burghers' wives ; the air

seems bad and heavy, and the light wanting physically and morally, in these old free-towns; there is intellectual sickness as well as bodily in those musty gabled houses; the mediæval spirit blights what revival of healthiness may exist in these commonwealths. And feudalism is outside the gates. There are the brutal, leering men-at-arms, in slashed, puffed doublets and heavy armour, face and dress as unhuman as possible, standing grimacing at the blood spirting from John the Baptist's decapitated trunk, as in Kranach's horrible print, while gaping spectators fill the castle-yard; there are the castles high on rocks amidst woods, with miserable villages below, where the Prodigal Son wallows among the swine, and the tattered boors tumble about in drunkenness, or rest wearied on their spades. There are the Middle Ages in full force. But had these Germans of the days of Luther really no thought beyond their own times and their own country? Had they really no knowledge of the antique? Not so; they had heard from their learned men, from Willibald Pirkheimer and Ulrich von Hutten, that the world had once been peopled with naked gods and goddesses. Nay, the very year perhaps that Raphael handed to his engraver, Marc Antonio, his magnificent drawing of the Judgment of Paris, Lukas Kranach bethought him to represent the story of the good Knight Paris giving the apple to the Lady Venus. There, on Mount

Ida, with a castellated rock in the distance, the charger of Paris browses beneath some stunted larches; the Trojan knight's helmet, with its monstrous beak and plume, lies on the ground; and near it reclines Paris himself, lazy, in complete armour, with frizzled fashionable beard. To him, all wrinkled and grinning with brutal lust, comes another bearded knight, with wings to his vizored helmet, Sir Mercury, leading the three goddesses, short, fat-cheeked German wenches, housemaids stripped of their clothes, stupid, brazen, indifferent. And Paris is evidently prepared with his choice: he awards the apple to the fattest, for among a half-starved, plague-stricken people like this, the fattest must needs be the chosen of gods and men.

No, such pagan scenes are mere burlesques, coarse mummeries, such as may have amused Nürnberg and Augsburg during Shrovetide, when drunken louts figured as Bacchus and sang drinking songs by Hans Sachs. There is no reality in all this; there is no belief in pagan gods. If we would see the haunting divinity of the German Renaissance, we shall find him prying and prowling in nearly every scene of real life; him, the ever present, the king of the Middle Ages, whose triumph we have seen on the cloister wall at Pisa, the Lord Death. His fleshless face peers from behind a bush at Zatzinger's stunted, fever-stricken lady and imbecile gentleman; he sits grin-

ning on a tree in Urs Graf's allegory, while the cynical knights, with haggard, sensual faces, crack jokes with the fat woman squatted below ; he puts his hand into the basket of Dürer's tattered pedlar ; he leers hideously at the stirrup of Dürer's armed and stalwart knight. He dances with all mankind from the emperor to the ploughman in Holbein's plates. No gods of youth and nature, no Hercules, no Hermes, no Venus, have invaded his German territories, as they invaded even his own palace, the burial-ground at Pisa ; the antique has not perverted Dürer and his fellows, as it perverted Masaccio and Signorelli and Mantegna, from the mediæval worship of Death.

The Italians had seen the antique and had let themselves be seduced by it, despite their civilization and their religion. Let us only rejoice thereat. There are indeed some, and among them the great English critic who is irrefutable when he is a poet, and irrational when he becomes a philosopher ;—there are some who tell us that in its union with antique art, the art of the followers of Giotto embraced death, and rotted away ever after. There are others, more moderate but less logical, who would teach us that in uniting with the antique, the mediæval art of the fifteenth century purified and sanctified the beautiful but evil child of Paganism ; that the goddess of Scopas and the athlete of Polyclete were raised to a higher sphere when Raphael changed the one into a Madonna, and Michael Angelo metamorphosed the other into a

prophet. But both schools of criticism are in the wrong. Every civilization has its inherent evil ; Antiquity had its inherent evils, as the Middle Ages had theirs ; Antiquity may have bequeathed to the Renaissance the bad with the good, as the Middle Ages had bequeathed to the Renaissance the good with the bad. But the art of Antiquity was not the evil, it was the good of Antiquity ; it was born of its strength and its purity only, and it was the incarnation of its noblest qualities. It could not be purified, because it was spotless ; it could not be sanctified, because it was holy. It could gain nothing from the art of the Middle Ages, alternately strong in brutal reality, and languid in mystic inanity ; the men of the Renaissance could, if they influenced it at all, influence the antique only for evil ; they belonged to an inferior artistic civilization, and if we conscientiously seek for the spiritual improvements brought by them into antique types, we shall see that they usually consist in spoiling their perfect proportions ; in making necks longer and muscles more prominent ; in rendering more or less flaccid, or meagre or coarse, the grand and delicate forms of antique art. And when we have examined into this purified art of the Renaissance, when we have compared coolly and equitably, we may perhaps confess that, while the Renaissance added immense wealth of beauty in colour, perspective, and grouping, it took away something of the perfection of simple lines and modest light and shade of the antique ; we may admit to ourselves that the grandest saint by Raphael is meagre

and stunted, and the noblest Virgin by Titian is overblown and sensual by the side of the demi-gods and amazons of antique sculpture.

The antique perfected the art of the Renaissance, it did not corrupt it. The art of the Renaissance fell indeed into shameful degradation soon after the period of its triumphant union with the antique; and Raphael's grand gods and goddesses, his exquisite Eros and radiant Psyche of the Farnesina, are indeed succeeded but too soon by the Olympus of Giulio Romano, an Olympus of harlots and acrobats, who smirk and mouth and wriggle and sprawl ignobly on the walls and ceilings of the dismantled palace which crumbles away among the stunted willows, the stagnant pools, and rank grass of the marshes of Mantua. But this is no more the fault of Antiquity than it is the fault of the Middle Ages; it is the fault of that great principle of life and of change which makes all things organic, be they physical or intellectual, germinate, grow, attain maturity, and then fade, wither, and rot. The dead art of Antiquity could never have brought the art of the Renaissance to an untimely end; the art of the Renaissance decayed because it was mature, and died because it had lived.

THE PORTRAIT ART.



## THE PORTRAIT ART



### I.

REAL and ideal—these are the handy terms, admiring or disapproving, which criticism claps with random facility on to every imaginable school. This artist or group of artists goes in for the real—the upright, noble, trumpery, filthy real ; that other artist or group of artists seeks after the ideal—the ideal which may mean sublimity or platitude. We summon every living artist to state whether he is a realist or an idealist ; we classify all dead artists as realists or idealists ; we treat the matter as if it were one of almost moral importance. Now the fact of the case is that the question of realism and idealism, which we calmly assume as already settled or easy to settle by our own sense of right and wrong, is one of the tangled questions of art-philosophy ; and one, moreover, which no amount of theory, but only historic fact, can ever set right. For, to begin with, we find realism and idealism coming before us in different ways and with different meaning and importance.

All art which is not addressing (as decrepit art is forced to do) faculties to which art does not spontaneously and properly appeal—all art is decorative, ornamental, idealistic therefore, since it consciously or unconsciously aims, not merely at reproducing the already existing, but at producing something which shall repay the looking at it, something which shall ornament, if not a place, at least our lives ; and such making of the ornamental, of the worth looking at, necessarily implies selection and arrangement—that is to say, idealism. At the same time, while art aims definitely at being in this sense decorative, art may very possibly aim more immediately at merely reproducing, without selection or arrangement, the actually existing things of the world ; and this in order to obtain the mere power of representation. In short, art which is idealistic as a master will yet be realistic as a scholar : it decorates when it achieves, it copies when it studies. But this is only half the question. Certain whole schools may be described as idealistic, others as realistic, in tendency ; and this, not in their study, but in their achievement. One school will obviously be contented with forms the most unselected and vulgar ; others will go but little out of their way in search of form-superiority ; while yet others, and these we must emphatically call idealistic, are squeamish to the last degree in the choice and adaptation of form, anxious to get the very best, and make the very best of it. Yet, on thinking over it, we shall find that realistic

and idealistic schools are all, in their achievements, equally striving after something which is not the mere reproduction of the already existing as such—striving, in short, after decoration. The pupil of Perugino will, indeed, wait patiently to begin his work until he can find a model fit for a god or goddess ; while the fellow-craftsman of Rembrandt will be satisfied with the first dirty old Jew or besotten barmaid that comes to hand. But the realistic Dutchman is not, therefore, any the less smitten with beauty, any the less eager to be ornamental, than the idealistic Italian : his man and woman he takes indeed with off-hand indifference, but he places them in that of which the Italian shall perhaps never have dreamed, in that on which he has expended all his science, his skill, his fancy, in that which he gives as his addition to the beautiful things of art—in atmosphere, in light, which are to the everyday atmosphere and light what the patiently sought for, carefully perfected god or goddess model of Raphael is to the everyday Jew, to the everyday barmaid, of Rembrandt.

The ideal, for the man who is quite coarsely realistic in his figures, exists in the air, light, colour ; and in saying this I have, so to speak, turned over the page too quickly, forestalled the expression of what I can prove only later : the disconnection of such comparative realism and idealism as this (the only kind of realism, let us remember, which can exist in great art) with any personal bias of the artist, its intimate dependence

upon the constitution and tendency of art, upon its preoccupations about form, or colour, or light, in a given country and at a given moment. And now I should wish to resume the more orderly treatment of the subject, which will lead us in time to the second half of the question respecting realism and idealism.

These considerations have come to me in connection with the portrait art of the Renaissance; and this very simply. For portrait is a curious bastard of art, sprung on the one side from a desire which is not artistic, nay, if anything, opposed to the whole nature and function of art: the desire for the mere likeness of an individual. The union with this interloping tendency, so foreign to the whole aristocratic temper of art, has produced portrait; and by the position of this hybrid, or at least far from regularly bred creature; by the amount of the real artistic quality of beauty which it is permitted to retain by the various schools of art, we can, even as by the treatment of similar social interlopers we can estimate the necessities and tendencies of various states of society, judge what are the conditions in which the various schools of art struggle for the object of their lives, which is the beautiful.

I have said that art is realistic in its periods or moments of study; and this is essentially the case even with the school which in many respects was the most unmistakably decorative and idealistic in intention: the school of Giotto. The Giottesques are

more than decorative artists, they are decorators in the most literal sense. Painting with them is merely one of the several arts and crafts enslaved by mediæval architecture and subservient to architectural effects. Their art is the only one which is really and successfully architecturally decorative; and to appreciate this we must contrast their fresco-work with that of the fifteenth century and all subsequent times. Masaccio, Ghirlandajo, Signorelli, turn the wall into a mere badly made frame; a gigantic piece of cardboard would do as well, and better; the colours melt into one another, the figures detach themselves at various degrees of relief; those upon the ceiling and pendentives are frequently upside down; yet these figures, which are so difficult to see, are worth seeing only in themselves, and not in relation to their position. The masonry is no longer covered, but carved, rendered uneven with the cavities and protrusions of perspective. In Mantegna's frescoes the wall becomes a slanting theatre scene, cunningly perspectived like Palladio's Teatro Olimpico; with Correggio, wall, masonry, everything, is dissolved, the side or cupola of a church becomes a rent in the clouds, streaming with light.

Not so with the Giottesque frescoes: the wall, the vault, the triumphant masonry is always present and felt, beneath the straight, flat bands of uniform colour; the symmetrical compartments, the pentacles, triangles, and segments, and borders of histories, whose figures never project, whose colours are separate as those in

a mosaic. The Giottesque frescoes, with their tiers and compartments of dark blue, their vague figures dressed in simple ultramarines, greens, dull reds, and purples ; their geometrical borders and pearlings and dog-tooths ; cover the walls, the ribbed and arched ceilings, the pointed raftering almost like some beautiful brown, blue, and tarnished gold leather-hangings ; the figures, outlined in dark paint, have almost the appearance of being stencilled on the wall. Such is Giottesque painting : an art which is not merely essentially decorative, but which is, moreover, what painting and sculpture remained throughout the Gothic period, subservient to the decorative effect of another art ; an art in which all is subordinated to architectural effect, in which form, colour, figures, houses, the most dramatic scenes of the most awful of all dramas, everything is turned into a kind of colossal and sublime wall-paper ; and such an art as this would lead us to expect but little realism, little deliberate and slavish imitation of the existing. Yet wherever there is life in this Gothic art (which has a horrible tendency, piously unobserved by critics, to stagnate into blundering repetition of the same thing), wherever there is progress, there is, in the details of that grandiose, idealistic decoration, realism of the crudest kind. Those Giottesque workers, who were not content with a kind of Gothic Byzantinism ; those who really handed over something vital to their successors of the fifteenth century, while

repeating the old idealistical decorations ; were studying with extraordinary crudeness of realism. Everything that was not conventional ornament or type was portrait ; and portrait in which the scanty technical means of the artist, every meagre line and thin dab of colour, every timid stroke of brush or of pencil, went towards the merciless delineation not merely of a body but of a soul. And the greater the artist, the more cruel the portrait : cruellest in representation of utter spiritual baseness in the two greatest of these idealistic decorators ; Giotto, and his latest disciple, Fra Angelico. Of this I should like to give a couple of examples.

In Giotto's frescoes at Santa Croce—one of the most lovely pieces of mere architectural decoration conceivable—there are around the dying and the dead St. Francis two groups of monks, which are astoundingly realistic. The solemn ending of the ideally beautiful life of sanctity which was so fresh in the memory of Giotto's contemporaries, is nothing beyond a set of portraits of the most absolutely mediocre creatures, moral and intellectual, of creatures the most utterly incapable of religious enthusiasm that ever made religion a livelihood. They gather round the dying and the dead St. Francis, a noble figure, not at all ecstatic or seraphic, but pure, strong, worn out with wise and righteous labour, a man of thought and action, upon whose hands and feet the stigmata of supernatural rapture are a mere absurdity. The

monks are presumably his immediate disciples, those fervent and delicate poetic natures of whom we read in the "Fioretti di San Francesco." To represent them Giotto has painted the likeness of the first half-dozen friars he may have met in the streets near Santa Croce: not caricatures, nor ideals, but portraits. Giotto has attempted neither to exalt nor to degrade them into any sort of bodily or spiritual interestingness. They are not low nor bestial nor extremely stupid. They are in various degrees dull, sly, routinist, prosaic, pedantic; their most noteworthy characteristic is that they are certainly the men who are not called by God. They are no scandal to the Church, but no honour; they are sloth, stupidity, sensualism, and cunning not yet risen to the dignity of a vice. They look upon the dying and the dead saint with indifference, want of understanding, at most a gape or a bright look of stupid miscomprehension at the stigmata: they do not even perceive that a saint is a different being from themselves. With these frescoes of Giotto I should wish to compare Fra Angelico's great ceremonial crucifixion in the cloister chapel of San Marco of Florence; for it displays to an extraordinary degree that juxtaposition of the most conventionally idealistic, pious decorativeness with the realism straightforward, unreflecting, and heartless to the point of becoming perfectly grotesque. The fresco is divided into two scenes: on the one side the crucifixion, the mystic actors of the drama, on the other

the holy men admitted to its contemplation. A sense that holy things ought to be old-fashioned, a respect for Byzantine inanity which invariable haunted the Giottesques in their capacity of idealistic decorators, of men who replaced with frescoes the solemn lifeless splendours of mosaic ; this kind of artistico-religious prudery has made Angelico, who was able to foreshorten powerfully the brawny crucified thieves, represent the Saviour dangling from the cross bleached, boneless, and shapeless, a thing that is not dead because it has never been alive. The holy persons around stand rigid, vacant, against their blue nowhere of background, with vague expanses of pink face looking neither one way nor the other ; mere modernized copies of the strange, goggle-eyed, vapid beings on the old Italian mosaics. This is not a representation of the actual reality of the crucifixion, like Tintoret's superb picture at S. Rocco, or Dürer's print, or so many others, which show the hill, the people, the hangman, the ladders and ropes and hammers and tweezers : it is a sort of mystic repetition of it ; subjective, if I may say so ; existing only in the contemplation of the saints on the opposite side, who are spectators only in the sense that a contemplative Christian may be said to be the mystic spectator of the Passion. The thing for the painter to represent is fervent contemplation, ecstatic realization of the past by the force of ardent love and belief ; the condition of mind of St. Francis, St. Catherine of Siena, Madame Guyon : it is the revelation of the great

tragedy of heaven to the soul of the mystic. Now, how does Fra Angelico represent this? A row of saints, founders of orders, kneel one behind the other, and by their side stand apostles and doctors of the Church; admitting them to the sight of the superhuman, with the gesture, the bland, indifferent vacuity of the Cameriere Segreto or Monsignore who introduces a troop of pilgrims to the Pope; they are privileged persons, they respect, they keep up decorum, they raise their eyes and compress their lips with ceremonious reverence; but, Lord! they have gone through it all so often, they are so familiar with it, they don't look at it any longer; they gaze about listlessly, they would yawn if they were not too well bred for that. The others, meanwhile, the sainted pilgrims, the men whose journey over the sharp stones and among the pricking brambles of life's wilderness finds its final reward in this admission into the presence of the Holiest, kneel one by one, with various expressions: one with the stupid delight of a religious sightseer; his vanity is satisfied, he will next draw a rosary from his pocket and get it blessed by Christ Himself; he will recount it all to his friends at home. Another is dull and gaping, a clown who has walked barefoot from Valencia to Rome, and got imbecile by the way; yet another, prim and dapper; the rest indifferent, looking restlessly about them, at each other, at their feet and hands, perhaps exchanging mute remarks about the length of time they are kept waiting; those

at the end of the kneeling procession, St. Peter Martyr and St. Giovanni Gualberto especially, have the bored, listless, devout look of the priestlets in the train of a bishop. All these figures, the standing ones who introduce and the kneeling ones who are being introduced, are the most perfect types of various states of dull, commonplace, mediocre routinist superstition; so many Camerlenghi on the one hand, so many Passionists or Propagandists on the other: the first aristocratic, bland and bored; the second, dull, listless, mumbling, chewing Latin Prayers which never meant much to their minds, and now mean nothing; both perfectly reverential and proper in behaviour, with no more possibility of individual fervour of belief than of individual levity of disbelief: the Church, as it exists in well-regulated decrepitude. And thus does the last of the Giottesques, the painter of glorified Madonnas and dancing angels, the saint, represent the saints admitted to behold the supreme tragedy of the Redemption.

Thus much for the Giottesques. The Tuscans of the early Renaissance developed up to the utmost, assisted by the goldsmiths and sculptors, who taught them modelling and anatomy, that realistic element of Giottesque painting. Its ideal decorative part had become impossible. Painting could no longer be a decoration of architecture, and it had not yet the means of being ornamental in itself; it was an art which did not achieve, but merely studied. Among its exercises

in anatomy, modelling, perspective, and so forth, always laborious and frequently abortive, its only spontaneous, satisfactory, mature production was its portrait work, Portraits of burghers in black robes and hoods ; of square-jawed youths with red caps stuck on to their fuzzy heads, of bald and wrinkled scholars and magnificoes ; of thinly bearded artizans ; people who stand round the preaching Baptist or crucified Saviour, look on at miracle or martyrdom, stolid, self-complacent, heedless, against their background of towered, walled, and cypress-ed city—of buttressed square and street ; ugly but real, interesting, powerful among the grotesque agglomerations of bag-of-bones nudities, bunched and taped-up draperies and out-of-joint architecture of the early Renaissance frescoes ; at best among its picture-book and Noah's-ark prettinesses of toy-box cypresses, vine trellises, inlaid house fronts, rabbits in the grass, and peacocks on the roofs ; for the early Renaissance, with the one exception of Masaccio, is in reality a childish time of art, giving us the horrors of school-hour blunders and abortions varied with the delights of nursery wonderland : maturity, the power of achieving, the perception of something worthy of perception, comes only with the later generation, the one immediately preceding the age of Raphael and Michael Angelo ; with Ghirlandajo, Signorelli, Filippino, Botticelli, Perugino, and their contemporaries.

But this period is not childish, is not immature in everything. Or, rather, the various arts which exist

together at this period are not all in the same stage of development. While painting is in this immature ugliness, and ideal sculpture, in works like Verrocchio's and Donatello's David, only a cleverer, more experienced, but less legitimate kind of painting, painting more successful in the present, but with no possible future ; the almost separate art of portrait-sculpture arises again where it was left by Græco-Roman masters, and, developing to yet greater perfection, gives in marble the equivalent of what painting will be able to produce only much later : realistic art which is decorative ; beautiful works made out of ugly materials.

The vicissitudes of Renaissance sculpture are strange : its life, its power, depend upon death ; it is an art developed in the burying vault and cloister cemetery. During the Middle Ages sculpture had had its reason, its vital possibility, its something to influence, nay, to keep it alive, in architecture ; but with the disappearance of Gothic building disappears also the possibility of the sculpture which covers the portals of Chartres and the belfry of Florence. The pseudo-classic colonnades, entablatures, all the thin bastard Ionic and Corinthian of Alberti and Bramante, did not require sculpture, or had their own little supply of un-fleshed ox-skulls, greengrocer's garlands, scallopings and wave-linings, which, with a stray siren and one or two bloated emperors' heads, amply sufficed. On the other hand, mediæval civilization and Christian

dogma did not encourage the production of naked or draped ideal statues like those which Antiquity stuck on countless temple fronts, and erected at every corner of square, street, or garden. The people of the Middle Ages were too grievously ill grown, distorted, hideous, to be otherwise than indecent in nudity ; they may have had an instinct of the kind, and, ugly as they knew themselves to be, they must yet have found in forms like those of Verrocchio's David insufficient beauty to give much pleasure. Besides, if the Middle Ages had left no moral room for ideal sculpture once freed from the service of architecture, they had still less provided it with a physical place. Such things could not be set up in churches, and only a very moderate number of statues could be wanted as open-air monuments in the narrow space of a still Gothic city ; and, in fact, ideal heroic statues of the early Renaissance are fortunately not only ugly, but comparatively few in number. There remained, therefore, for sculpture, unless contented to dwindle down into brass and gold miniature work, no regular employment save that connected with sepulchral monuments. During the real Middle Ages, and in the still Gothic north, the ornamentation of a tomb belonged to architecture : from the superb miniature minsters, pillared and pinnacled and sculptured, cathedrals within the cathedral, to the humbler foliated arched canopy, protecting a simple sarcophagus at the corner of many a street in Lombardy. The sculptor's work was but the low

relief on the church flags, the timidly carved, outlined, cross-legged knight or praying priest, flattened down on his pillow as if ashamed even of that amount of prominence, and in a hurry to be trodden down and obliterated into a few ghostly outlines. But to this humiliated prostrate image, to this flat thing doomed to obliteration, came the sculptor of the Renaissance, and bade the wafer-like simulacrum fill up, expand, raise itself, lift itself on its elbow, arise and take possession of the bed of state, the catafalque raised high above the crowd, draped with brocade, carved with rich devices of leaves and beasts of heraldry, roofed over with a *daïs*, which is almost a triumphal arch, garlanded with fruits and flowers, upon which the illustrious dead were shown to the people ; but made eternal, and of eternal magnificence, by the stone-cutter, and guarded, not for an hour by the liveried pages or chaunting monks, but by winged genii for all eternity. Some people, I know, call this a degradation, and say that it was the result of corrupt pride, this refusal to have the dear or illustrious dead scraped out any longer by the shoe-nails of every ruffian, rubbed out by the knees of every kitchen wench ; but to me it seems that it was due merely to the fact that sculpture had lost its former employment, and that a great art cannot (thank Heaven!) be pietistically self-humiliating. Be this as it may, the sculpture of the Renaissance had found a new and singularly noble line of work, the one in which it was

great, unique, unsurpassed, because untutored. It worked here without models, to suit modern requirements, with modern spirit; it was emphatically modern sculpture; the only modern sculpture which can be talked of as something original, genuine, valuable, by the side of antique sculpture. Greek Antiquity had evaded death, and neglected the dead; a garland of mænads and fauns among ivy leaves, a battle of amazons or centaurs; in the late semi-Christian, platonic days, some Orphic emblem, or genius; at most, as in the exquisite tombs of the Keramikos of Athens, a figure, a youth on a prancing steed, like the Phidian monument of Dexileus; a maiden, draped and bearing an urn; but neither the youth nor the maiden is the inmate of the tomb: they are types, living types, no portraits. Nay, even where Antiquity shows us Death or Hermes, gently leading away the beloved; the spirit, the ghost, the dead one, is unindividual. "Sarkophagen und Urnen bekränzte der Heide mit Leben," said Goethe; but it was the life which was everlasting because it was typical: the life not which had been relinquished by the one buried there, but the life which the world danced on, forgetful, round his ashes. The Romans, on the contrary, graver and more retentive folk than the Greeks, as well as more domestic, less coffee-house living, appear to have inherited from the Etruscans a desire to preserve the effigy of the dead, a desire unknown to the Greeks. But the Etrusco-Roman monuments, where

husband and wife stare forth togaed and stolaed, half reduced to a conventional crop-headedness, grim and stiff as if sitting unwillingly for their portrait; or reclining on the sarcophagus-lid, neither dead, nor asleep, nor yet alive and awake, but with a hieratic mummy stare, have little of æsthetic or sympathetic value. The early Renaissance, then, first bethought it of representing the real individual in the real death slumber. And I question whether anything more fitting could be placed on a tomb than the effigy of the dead as we saw them just before the coffin-lid closed down; as we would give our all to see them but one little moment longer; as they continue to exist for our fancy within the grave; for to any but morbid feelings the beloved can never suffer decay. Whereas a portrait of the man in life, as the throning popes in St. Peter's, seems heartless and derisive; such monuments striking us as conceived and ordered by their inmates while alive, like Michael Angelo's Pope Julius, and Browning's Bishop, who was so preoccupied about his tomb in St. Praxed's Church. The Renaissance, the late Middle Ages, felt better than this: on the extreme pinnacle, high on the roof, they might indeed place against the russet brick or the blue sky, amid the hum of life and the movement of the air, the living man, like the Scaligers, the mailed knight on his charger, lance in rest; but in the church below, under the funereal pall, they could place only the body such as it may have lain on the bier.

And that figure on the bier was the great work of Renaissance sculpture. Inanimate and vulgar when in heroic figures they tried to emulate the ancients, the sculptors of the fifteenth century have found their own line. The modesty, the simplicity, the awful and beautiful repose of the dead ; the individual character cleared of all its conflicting meannesses by death, simplified, idealized as it is in the memory of the survivors—all these are things which belong to the Renaissance. As the Greeks gave the strong, smooth life-current circulating through their heroes ; so did these men of the fifteenth century give the gentle and harmonious ebbing after-life of death in their sepulchral monuments. Things difficult to describe, and which must be seen and remembered. There is the monument, now in the museum at Ravenna, by a sculptor whose name, were it known, would surely be among the greatest, of the condottiere, Braccioforte : the body prone in its heavy case of armour, not yet laid out in state, but such as he may have been found in the evening, when the battle was over, under a tree where they had carried him to die while they themselves went back to fight ; the head has fallen back, sideways, weighed down by the helmet, which has not even been unbuckled, only the face, the clear-cut, austere features, visible beneath the withdrawn vizor ; the eyes have not been closed ; and there are few things more exquisite and solemn at once in all sculpture, than the indication of those no longer seeing

eyes, of that broken glance, beneath the half-closed lids. There is Rossellino's Cardinal of Portugal at S. Miniato a Monte: the slight body, draped in episcopal robes, lying with delicate folded hands, in gracious decorum of youthful sanctity; the strong delicate head, of clear feature and gentle furrow of suffering and thought, a face of infinite purity of strength, strength still ungnarled by action: a young priest, who in his virginal dignity is almost a noble woman. And there is the Ilaria Guinigi of Jacopo della Quercia (the man who had most natural affinity with the antique of all these sculptors, as one may see from the shattered remains of the Fonte Gaia of Siena), the lady stretched out on the rose-garlanded bed of state in a corner of Lucca Cathedral, her feet upon her sleeping dog, her sweet, girlish head, with wavy plaits of hair encircled by a rose-wreathed, turban-like diadem, lying low on round cushions; the bed gently giving way beneath the beautiful, ample-bodied body, round which the soft robe is chastely gathered, and across which the long-sleeved arms are demurely folded; the most beautiful lady (whose majestic tread through the palace rooms we can well imagine) that the art of the fifteenth century has recorded. There is, above all, the Carlo Marsuppini of Desiderio da Settignano, the humanist Secretary of the Commonwealth, lying on the sarcophagus, superb with shell fretwork and curling acanthus, in Santa Croce of Florence. For the youthful beauty of the

Cardinal of Portugal and of the Lady Ilaria are commonplace compared with the refinement of this worn old face, with scant wavy hair and thin, gently furrowed, but by no means ploughed-up features. The slight figure looks as if in life it must have seemed almost transparent ; and the hands are very pathetic : noble, firm hands, subtle of vein and wrist, crossed simply, neither in prayer nor in agony, but in gentle weariness, over the book on his breast. That book is certainly no prayer-book ; rather a volume of Plato or Cicero : in his last moments the noble old man has longed for a glance over the familiar pages ; they have placed the book on his breast, but it has been too late ; the drowsiness of death has overtaken him, and with his last sigh he has gently folded his hands over the volume, with the faint, last clinging to the things beloved in this world.

Such is that portrait sculpture of the early Renaissance, its only sculpture, if we except the exquisite work in babies and angels just out of the nursery of the Robbias, which is a real achievement. But how achieved ? This art is great just by the things which Antiquity did not. And what are those things ? Shall we say that it is sentiment ? But all fine art has tact, antique art most certainly ; and as to pathos, why, any quiet figure of a dead man or woman, however rudely carved, has pathos ; nay, there is pathos in the poor puling, hysterical art which makes angels draw the curtains of fine ladies' bedchambers, and fine ladies, in hoop or

limp Grecian dress, faint (the smelling bottle, Betty!) over their lord's coffin; there is pathos, to a decently constituted human being, wherever (despite all absurdities) we can imagine that there lies some one whom it was bitter to see departing, to whom it was bitter to depart. Pathos, therefore, is not the question; and, if you choose to call it sentiment, it is in reality a sentiment for line and curve, for stone and light. The great question is, How did these men of the Renaissance make their dead people look beautiful? For they were not all beautiful in life, and ugly folk do not grow beautiful merely because they are dead. The Cardinal of Portugal, the beautiful Ilaria herself, were you to sketch their profile and place it by the side of no matter what ordinary antique, would greatly fall short of what we call sculpturesque beauty; and many of the others, old humanists and priests and lawyers, are emphatically ugly: snub or absurdly hooked noses, retreating or deformedly overhanging foreheads, fleshy noses, and flabby cheeks, blear eyes and sunk-in mouths; and a perfect network of wrinkles and creases, which, hard as it is to say, have been scooped out not merely by age, but by low mind, fretting and triumphant animalism. Now, by what means did the sculptor—the sculptor, too unacquainted with sculptural beauty (witness his ugly ideal statues), to be able, like the man who turned the successors of Alexander into a race of leonine though crazy demi-gods—to insidiously idealize these ugly and

insignificant features ; by what means did he turn these dead men into things beautiful to see ? I have said that he took up art where Græco-Roman Antiquity had left it. Remark that I say Græco-Roman, and I ought to add much more Roman than Greek. For Greek sculpture, nurtured in the habit of perfect form, art to which beauty was a cheap necessity, invariably idealized portrait, idealized it into beauty or inanity. But when Greek art had run its course ; when beauty of form had well-nigh been exhausted or begun to pall ; certain artists, presumably Greeks, but working for Romans, began to produce portrait work of quite a new and wonderful sort : the beautiful portraits of ugly old men, of snub little boys, work which was clearly before its right time, and was swamped by idealized portraits, insipid, nay, inane, from the elegant revivalist busts of Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius down to the bonnet blocks of the lower empire. Of this Roman portrait art, of certain heads of half-idiotic little Cæsar brats, of sly and wrinkled old men, things which ought to be so ugly and yet are so beautiful, we say, at least, perhaps unformulated, we think, "How Renaissance !" And the secret of the beauty of these few Græco-Roman busts, which is also that of Renaissance portrait sculpture, is that the beauty is quite different in kind from the beauty of Greek ideal sculpture, and obtained by quite different means.

It is, essentially, that kind of beauty which I began by saying belonged to realistic art, to the art which is

not squeamish about the object which it represents, but is squeamish about the manner and medium in which that indifferent object is represented; it is a kind of beauty, therefore, more akin to that of Rembrandt and Velasquez than to that of Michael Angelo or Raphael. It is the beauty, not of large lines and harmonies, beauty residing in the real model's forms, beauty real, wholesale, which would be the same if the man were not marble but flesh, not in a given position but moving; but it is a beauty of combinations of light and surface, a beauty of texture opposed to texture, which would probably be unperceived in the presence of the more regal beauty of line and colour harmonies, and which those who could obtain this latter would employ only as much as they were conducive to such larger beauties. And this beauty of texture opposed to texture and light combined with surface is a very real thing; it is the great reality of Renaissance sculpture: this beauty, resulting from the combination, for instance, in a commonplace face, of the roughness and coarser pore of the close shaven lips and chin with the smoothness of the waxy hanging cheeks; the one catching the light, the other breaking it into a ribbed and forked penumbra. The very perfection of this kind of work is Benedetto da Maiano's bust of Pietro Mellini in the Bargello at Florence. The elderly head is of strongly marked osseous structure, yet fleshed with abundant and flaccid flesh, hanging in folds or creases round the mouth and

chin, yet not flobbery and floppy, but solid, though yielding, creased, wrinkled, crevassed rather as a sandy hillside is crevassed by the trickling waters; semi-solid, promising slight resistance, waxy, yielding to the touch. But all the flesh has, as it were, gravitated to the lower part of the face, conglomerated, or rather draped itself, about the mouth, firmer for sunken teeth and shaving; and the skin has remained alone across the head, wrinkled, yet drawn in tight folds across the dome-shaped skull, as if, while the flesh disappeared, the bone also had enlarged. And on the temples the flesh has once been thick, the bone (seemingly) slight; and now the skin is being drawn, recently, and we feel more and more every day, into a radiation of minute creases, as if the bone and flesh were having a last struggle. Now in this head there is little beauty of line (the man has never been good-looking), and there is not much character in the sense of strongly marked mental or moral personality. I do not know, nor care, what manner of man this may have been. The individuality is one, not of the mind, but of the flesh. What interests, attaches, is not the character or temperament, but the bone and skin, the creases and folds of flesh. And herein also lies the beauty of the work. I do not mean its interest or mere technical skill, I mean distinctly visible and artistic beauty.

Thus does the sculptor of the Renaissance get beauty, visible beauty, not psychologic interest, out of

a plain human being ; but the beauty (and this is the distinguishing point of what I must call realistic decorative art) does not exist necessarily in the plain human being : he merely affords the beginning of a pattern which the artist may be able to carry out. A person may have in him the making of a really beautiful bust and yet be ugly ; just as the same person may afford a subject for a splendid painting and for an execrable piece of sculpture. The wrinkles and creases in a face like that of Benedetto da Maiano's Mellini would probably be ugly and perhaps disgusting in the real reddish, flaccid, discoloured flesh ; while they are admirable in the solid and supple-looking marble, in its warm and delicate bistre and yellow. Material has an extraordinary effect upon form ; colour, though not a positive element in sculpture, has immense negative power in accentuating or obliterating the mere line. All form becomes vague and soft in the dairy flaccidness of modern ivory ; and clear and powerful in the dark terra cotta, which can ennoble even the fattest and flattest faces with its wonderful faculty for making mere surface markings, mere crowsfeet, interesting. Thus also with bronze : the polished, worked bronze, of fine chocolate burnish and reddish reflections, mars all beauty of line ; how different the unchased, merely rough cast, greenish, with infinite delicate greys and browns, making, for instance, the head of an old woman like an exquisite, withered, shrivelled, veined autumnal leaf. It is

moreover, as I have said, a question of combination of surface and light, this art which makes beautiful busts of ugly men. The ideal statue of the Greeks intended for the open air ; fit to be looked at under any light, high or low, brilliant or veiled, had indeed to be prepared to look well under any light ; but to look well under any light means not to use any one particular relation of light as an ally ; the surface was kept modestly subordinated to the features, the features which must needs look well at all moments and from all points of view. But the Renaissance sculptor knew where his work would be placed ; he could calculate the effect of the light falling invariably through this or that window ; he could make a fellow-workman of that light, present for it to draw or to obliterate what features he liked, bid it sweep away such or such surfaces with a broad stream, cut them with a deep shadow, caress their smooth chiselling or their rough grainings, mark as with a nail the few large strokes of the point which gave the firmness to the strained muscle or stretched skin. Out of this model of his, this plain old Burgess, he and his docile friend the light, could make quite a new thing ; a new pattern of bosses and cavities, of smooth sweeps and tracked lines, of creases and folds of flesh, of pliable linen and rough brocade of dress : something new, something which, without a single feature being straightened or shortened, yet changed completely the value of the whole assemblage of features ; something undreamed of by

nature in moulding that ugly old merchant or humanist. With this art which produced works like Desiderio da Settignano's Carlo Marsuppini and Benedetto da Maiano's Pietro Mellini, is intimately connected the art of the great medallists of the Renaissance—Pasti, Guacialotti, Niccolò Fiorentino, and, greatest of all, Pisanello. Its excellence depends precisely upon its independence of the ideal work of Antiquity ; nay, even upon the fact that, while the ancients, striking their coins in chased metal dies, obtained an astonishing minuteness and clearness of every separate little stroke and dint, and were therefore forced into an almost more than sculptural perfection of mere line, of mere profile and throat and elaborately composed hair, a sort of sublime abstraction of the possible beauty of a human face, as in the coins of Syracuse and also of Alexander ; the men of the fifteenth century employed the process of casting the bronze in a concave mould obtained by the melting away of a medallion in wax ; in wax, which taking the living impress of the artist's finger, and recalling in its firm and yet soft texture the real substance of the human face, insensibly led the medallist to seek, not sharp and abstract lines, but simple, strongly moulded bosses ; not ideal beauty, but the real appearance of life. It is, moreover, a significant fact that while the men who, half a century or so later, made fine, characterless die-stamped medals in imitation of the antique, Caradossi and Benvenuto for instance, were gold-

smiths and sculptors, workers with the chisel, artists seeking essentially for abstract elegance of line ; the two greatest medallists of the early Renaissance, Vittore Pisano and Matteo di Pasti, were both of them painters ; and painters of the Northern Italian school, to whom colour and texture were all important, and linear form a matter of indifference. And indeed, if we look at the best work of what I may call the wax mould medallists of the fifteenth century, even at the magnificent marble medallions of the laurel-wreathed head of Sigismund Malatesta on the pillars of his church at Rimini, modelled by Pasti, we shall see that these men were preoccupied almost exclusively with the almost pictorial effect of the flesh in its various degrees of boss and of reaction of the light ; and that the character, the beauty even, which they attained, is essentially due to a skilful manipulation of texture, and surface, and light—one might almost say of colour. We all know Pisanello's famous heads of the Malatesti of Rimini : the saturnine Sigismund, the delicate dapper Novello, the powerful yet beautiful Isotta ; but there are other Renaissance medals which illustrate my meaning even better, and connect my feelings on the subject of this branch of art more clearly with my feelings towards such work as Benedetto's Pietro Mellini. Foremost among these is the perhaps somewhat imperfect and decidedly grotesque, but astonishingly powerful, naïf and characteristic Lorenzo dei Medici by Niccolò Fiorentino, the

real grandeur of whose conception of this coarse yet imaginative head may be profitably contrasted with the classicizing efforts after the demi-god or successor of Alexander in Pollaiolo's famous medal of the Pazzi conspiracy. Next to this I would place a medal by Guacialotti of Bishop Niccolò Palmieri, with the motto, "Nudus egressus sic redibo"—singularly appropriate to the shameless fleshliness of the personage, with his naked fat chest and shoulders, his fat, pig-like cheeks and greasy-looking bald head; a hideous beast, yet magnificent in his bestiality like some huge fattened porker. These medals give us, as does the bust of Pietro Mellini, beauty of the portrait despite ugliness of the original. But there are two other medals, this time by Pisanello, and, as it seems to me, perhaps his masterpieces, which show the quite peculiar way in which this homely charm of portraiture amalgamates, so as to form a homogeneous and most seemingly simple whole, with the homely charm of certain kinds of pure and simple youthful types. One of these (the reverse of which fantastically represents the four elements, the wooded earth, the starry sky, the rippled sea, the sun, all in one sphere) is the portrait of Don Inigo d'Avalos; the other that of Cecilia Gonzaga. This slender beardless boy in the Spanish shovel hat and wisp of scarf twisted round the throat; and this tall, long-necked girl, with sloping shoulders and still half-developed bosom; are, so to speak, brother and sister in art, in Pisanello's wonder-

ful genius. The relief of the two medals is extremely low, so that in certain lights the effigies vanish almost completely, sink into the pale green surface of the bronze ; the portraits are a mere film, a sort of haze which has arisen on the bronze and gathered into human likeness ; but in this film, this scarce perceptible relief, we are made to perceive the slender osseous structure, the smooth, sleek, childish blond flesh and hair, the delicate, undecided pallor of extreme youth and purity, even as we might in some elaborate portrait by Velasquez, but with a springlike healthiness which Velasquez, painting his lymphatic Hapsburgs, rarely has.

Such is this Renaissance art of medals, this side branch of the great realistic portraiture in stone of the Benedettos, Desiderios, and Rossellinos ; a perfect thing in itself ; and one which, if we muse over it in connection with the more important works of fifteenth century sculpture, will perhaps lead us to think that, as the sculpture of Antiquity, in its superb idealism, its devotion to the perfect line and curve of beauty, achieved the highest that mere colourless art can achieve—thanks to the very purity, sternness, and narrowness of its sculpturesque feeling—so also, perhaps, modern sculpture, should it ever re-arise, must be a continuation of the tendencies of the Renaissance, must be the humbler sister of painting, must seek for the realistic portrait and begin, perhaps, with the realistic medal.

## II.

This kind of realism, where only the model is ugly, while the portrait is beautiful; which seeks decorative value by other means than the intrinsic excellence of form in the object represented, this kind of realism is quite different in sort from the realisms of immature art, which, aiming at nothing beyond a faithful copy, is content with producing an ugly picture of an ugly thing. Now this latter kind of realism endured in painting some time after decorative realism such as I have described had reached perfection in sculpture. Nor was it till later, and when the crude scholastic realism had completely come to an end, that there became even partially possible in painting decorative realism analogous to what we have noticed in sculpture; while it was not till after the close of the Italian Renaissance period that the painters arose in Spain and the Netherlands who were able to treat their subjects with the uncompromising decorative realism of Desiderio or Rosellino or Benedetto da Maiano. For the purely imitative realism of the painters of the early Renaissance was succeeded in Italy by idealism, which matured in the great art of intrinsically beautiful linear form of Michael Angelo and Raphael, and the great art of intrinsically beautiful colour form of Giorgione and Titian. These two schools were bound to be, each in its degree, idealistic. Complete power of mere representation in tint and

colour having been obtained through the realistic drudgery of the early Renaissance, selection in the objects thus to be represented had naturally arisen; and the study of the antique had further hastened and directed this movement of art no longer to study but to achieve, to be decorative once more, decorative no longer in subservience to architecture, but as the separate and self-sufficing art of painting. Selection, therefore, which is the only practical kind of idealism, had begun as soon as painting was possessed of the power of representing objects in their relations of line and colour, with that amount of light and shadow requisite to the just appreciation of the relations of form and the just relations of colour. Now art which stops short at this point of representation must inevitably be, if decorative at all, idealistically decorative; it must be squeamish respecting the objects represented, respecting their real structure, colour, position, and grouping. For, of the visible impressions received from an object, some are far more intrinsic than others. Suppose we see a woman, beautiful in the structure of her body, and beautiful in the colour of her person and her draperies, standing under a light which is such as we should call beautiful and interesting: of these three qualities one will be intrinsic in the woman, the second very considerably so, the third not at all. For, let us call that woman away and replace her immediately by another woman chosen at random. We shall immediately perceive

that we have lost one pleasurable impression, that of beautiful bodily structure: the woman has taken away her well-shapen body. Next we shall perceive a notable diminution in the second pleasurable impression: the woman has taken with her, not indeed her well-tinted garments, which we may have bestowed on her successor, but her beautifully coloured skin and hair, so that of the pleasing colour-impression will remain only as much as was due to, and may have been retained with, the original woman's clothes. But if we look for our third pleasurable impression, our beautiful light, we shall find that unchanged, whether it fall upon a magnificently arrayed goddess or upon a sordid slut. And, conversely, the beautiful woman, when withdrawn from that light and placed in any other, will be equally lovely in form, even if we cast her in plaster, and lose the colour of her skin and hair; or if we leave her not only the beautiful tints of her flesh and hair, but her own splendidly coloured garments, we shall still have, in whatsoever light, a magnificent piece of colour. But if we recall the poor ugly creature who has succeeded her from out of that fine effect of light, we shall have nothing but a hideous form invested in hideous colour.

This rough diagram will be sufficient to explain my thought respecting the relative degree to which the art dealing with linear form, that dealing with colour and that dealing with light, with the medium in which form and colour are perceived; is each

respectively bound to be idealistically or realistically decorative. Now painting was æsthetically mature, possessed the means to achieve great beauty, at a time when of the three modes of representation there had as yet developed only those of linear form and colour; and the very possibility and necessity of immediately achieving all that could be achieved by these means delayed for a long time the development of the third mode of representation: the representation of objects as they appear with reference to the light through which they are seen. A beginning had indeed been made. Certain of Correggio's effects of light, even more an occasional manner of treating the flesh and hair, reducing both form and colour to a kind of vague boss and vague sheen, such as they really present in given effects of light, a something which we define roughly as eminently modern in the painting of his clustered cherubs; all this is certainly a beginning of the school of Velasquez. Still more so is it the case with Andrea del Sarto, the man of genius whom critics love to despatch as a mediocrity, because his art, which is art altogether for the eyes, and in which he innovated more than any of his contemporaries, does not afford any excuse for the irrelevancies of ornamental criticism; with him the appearance of form and colour, acted upon by light, the relative values of which flesh and draperies consist with reference to the surrounding medium, all this becomes so evident a preoccupation and a basis for decorative effects, as

to give certain of his works an almost startling air of being modern. But this tendency comes to nothing : the men of the sixteenth century appear scarcely to have perceived wherein lay the true excellence of this "Andrea senza errori," deeming him essentially the artist of linear perfection ; while the innovations of Correggio in the way of showing the relations of flesh tones and light ended in the mere coarse gala illuminations in which his successors made their seraphs plunge and sprawl. There was too much to be done, good and bad, in the way of mere linear form and mere colour ; and as art of mere linear form and colour, indifferent of all else, did the art of the Italian Renaissance run to seed.

I said at the beginning of this paper that the degree to which any art is strictly idealistic, can be measured by the terms which it will make with portrait. For as portrait is due to the desire to represent a person quite apart from that person affording material for decoration, it is evident that only the art which can call in the assistance of decorative materials, independent of the represented individual, can possibly make a beautiful picture out of an ugly man ; while the art which deals only with such visible peculiarities as are inherent in the individual, has no kind of outlet, is cornered, and can make of a repulsive original only a repulsive picture. The analogy to this we have already noticed in sculpture : antique sculpture, considering only the linear bosses which existed equally

in the living man and in the statue, could not afford to represent plain people ; while Renaissance sculpture, extracting a large amount of beauty out of combinations of surface and light, was able, as long as it could arrange such an artificial combination, to dispense with great perfection in the model. Nay, if we except Renaissance statuary as a kind of separate art, we may say that this independence of the object portrayed is a kind of analytic test, enabling us to judge at a glance, and by the degree of independence from the model, the degree to which any art is removed from the mere line and boss of antique sculpture. In the statue standing free in any light that may chance to come, every form must be beautiful from every point ; but in proportion as the new elements of painting enter, in proportion as the actual linear form and boss is marked and helped out by grouping, colour, and light and shade, does the actual perfection of the model become less important ; until, under the reign of light as the chief factor, it becomes altogether indifferent. In this fact lies the only rational foundation for the notion, made popular by Hegel, that painting is an art in which beauty is of much less account than in sculpture ; failing to understand that the sum total of beauty remained the same, whether dependent upon the concentration of a single element or obtained by the co-operation of several consequently less singly important elements.

But to return to the question of portrait art. From

what we have seen, it is clear that art which requires perfection of form will be reduced to ugliness if cramped in the obtaining of such perfection, whereas art which can obtain beauty by other means will still have a chance when reduced to imitate ugly objects. Hence it is that while the realistically decorative art of the seventeenth century can make actually beautiful things of the portraits of ugly people, the idealistically decorative art of the Renaissance produces portraits which are cruelly ugly in proportion as the art is purely idealistic. Yet even in idealism there are degrees: the more the art is confined to mere linear form, to the exclusion of colour, the uglier will be the portraits. With Michael Angelo the difficulty was simplified to impossibility: he could not paint portrait at all; and in his sculptured portraits of the two Medicean dukes at S. Lorenzo he evaded all attempt at likeness, making those two men into scarcely more than two architectural monsters, half-human cousins of the fantastic creatures who keep watch on the belfries and gurgoyles of a Gothic cathedral. It is almost impossible to think of Michael Angelo attempting portrait: the man's genius cannot be constrained to it, and what ought to be mere ugliness would come out idealized into grandiose monstrosity. Men like Titian and Tintoret are at the other end of the scale of ideal decoration: they are bordering upon the domain of realism. Hence they can raise into interest, by the mere power of colour, many an insignificant

type ; yet even they are incapable of dealing with absolute ugliness, with absence of fine colour, or, if they do deal with it, there is an immediate improvement upon the model, and the appearance of truthfulness goes. Between the absolute incapacity for dealing with ugliness of Michael Angelo, and the power of compromising with it of Titian and Tintoret, Raphael stands half-way : he can call in the assistance of colour just sufficiently to create a setting of carefully harmonized draperies and accessories, beautiful enough to allow of his filling it up with the most cruelly ugly likeness which any painter ever painted. Far too much has been written about Raphael in general, but not half enough about Raphael as a portrait-painter ; for by the side of the eclectic idealist, who combined and balanced beauty almost into insipidity, is the most terribly, inflexibly veracious portrait-painter that ever was. Compared with those sternly straightforward portraits of his Florentine and Roman time, where ugliness and baseness are never attenuated by one tittle, and alloyed nobility or amiability, as with his finer models, like the two Donis, husband and wife, and Bibbiena, is never purified of its troubling element ; compared with them the Venetian portraits are mere insincere, enormously idealized pieces of colour-harmony ; nay, the portraits of Velasquez are mere hints—given rapidly by a sickened painter striving to make those scrofulous Hapsburgs no longer mere men, but keynotes of harmonies of light—of

what the people really are. For Velasquez seems to show us the temperament, the potentiality of his people, and to leave us, with a kind of dignified and melancholy silence as to all further, to find out what life, what feelings and actions, such a temperament implies. But Raphael shows us all : the temperament and the character, the real active creature, with all the marks of his present temper and habits, with all the indications of his immediate actions upon him : completely without humour or bitterness, without the smallest tendency to twist the reality into caricature or monstrosity, nay, perhaps without much psychologic analysis to tell him the exact meaning of what he is painting, going straight to the point, and utterly ruthless from sheer absence of all alternative of doing otherwise than he does. There is nothing more cruelly realistic in the world, cruel not only to the base originals but to the feelings of the spectator, than the harmony of villainies, of various combinations of black and hog-like bestiality, and fox and wolf-like cunning and ferocity with wicked human thought and self-command, which Raphael has enshrined in that splendid harmony of scarlet silk and crimson satin, and purple velvet and dull white brocade, as the portraits of Leo X. and his cardinals Rossi and Dei Medici.

The idealistic painter, accustomed to rely upon the intrinsic beauty which he has hitherto been able to select or create ; accustomed also to think of form as

something quite independent of the medium through which it is seen, scarcely conscious of the existence of light and air in his habit of concentrating all attention upon a figure placed, as it were, in a sort of vacuum of indifference;—this idealistic artist is left without any resources when bid to paint an ugly man or woman. With the realistic artist, to whom the man or woman is utterly indifferent, to whom the medium in which they are seen is everything, the case is just reversed: let him arrange his light, his atmospheric effect, and he will work into their pattern no matter what plain or repulsive wretch. To Velasquez the flaccid yellowish fair flesh, with its grey downy shadows, the limp pale drab hair, which is grey in the light and scarcely perceptibly blond in the shade, all this unhealthy, bloodless, feebly living, effete mass of humanity called Philip IV. of Spain, shivering in moral anæmia like some dog thorough bred into nothingness, becomes merely the foundation for a splendid harmony of pale tints. Again, the poor little baby princess, with scarce visible features, seemingly kneaded (but not sufficiently pinched and modelled) out of the wet ashes of an *auto da fè*, in her black-and-white frock (how different from the dresses painted by Raphael and Titian!), dingy and gloomy enough for an abbess or a cameriera major, this childish personification of courtly dreariness, certainly born on an Ash Wednesday, becomes the principal strands for a marvellous tissue of silvery and

ashy light, tinged yellowish in the hair, bluish in the eyes and downy cheeks, pale red in the lips and the rose in the hair; something to match which in beauty you must think of some rarely seen veined and jaspered rainy twilight, or opal-tinted hazy winter morning. Ugliness, nay, repulsiveness, vanish, subdued into beauty, even as noxious gases may be subdued into health-giving substances by some cunning chemist. The difference between such portraits as these and the portraits by Raphael does not however consist merely in the beauty: there is also the fact that if you take one of Velasquez's portraits out of their frame, reconstitute the living individual, and bid him walk forth in whatsoever light may fall upon him, you will have something infinitely different from the portrait, and of which your only distinct feeling will be that a fine portrait might be made of the creature; whereas it is a matter of complete indifference whether you see Raphael's Leo X. in the flesh or in his gilded frame.

Whatever may fairly be said respecting the relative value of idealistic and realistic decorative art is really also connected with this latter point. Considering that realistic art is merely obtaining beauty by attention to other factors than those which preoccupy idealistic art, that the one fulfils what the other neglects—taking the matter from this point of view, it would seem as if the two kinds of arts were, so to speak, morally equal; and that any vague sense of

mysterious superior dignity clinging to idealistic art was a mere shred of long discarded pedantry. But it is not so. For realistic art does more than merely bring into play powers unknown to idealistic art: it becomes, by the possession of these powers, utterly indifferent to the intrinsic value of the forms represented: it is so certain of making everything lovely by its harmonies of light and atmosphere that it almost prefers to choose inferior things for this purpose. I am thinking at present of a picture by I forget what Dutchman in our National Gallery, representing in separate compartments five besotten-looking creatures, symbolical of the five senses: they are ugly, brutish, with I know not what suggestion of detestable temperament in their bloodshot flesh and vermilion lips, as if the whole man were saturated with his appetite. Yet the Dutchman has found the means of making these degraded types into something which we care to look at, and to look at on account of its beauty; even as, in lesser degree, Rubens has always managed to make us feel towards his flaccid, veal-complexioned, fish-eyed women, something of what we feel towards the goddesses of the Parthenon; towards the white-robed, long-gloved ladies, with meditative face beneath their crimped auburn hair, of Titian.

Viewed in one way, there is a kind of nobility in the very fact that such realistic art can make us pardon, can redeem, nay almost sanctify, so much. But is it right thus to pardon, redeem, and sanctify;

thus to bring the inferior on to the level of the superior? Nay, is it not rather wrong to teach us to endure so much meanness and ugliness in creatures, on account of the nobility with which they are represented? Is this not vitiating our feelings, blunting our desire for the better, our repugnance for the worse?

A great and charitable art, this realistic art of the seventeenth century, and to be respected for its very tenderness towards the scorned and castaway things of reality; but accustoming us, perhaps too much, like all charitable and reclaiming impulses, to certain unworthy contacts: in strange contrast herein with that narrow but ascetic and aristocratic art of idealism, which, isolated and impoverished though it may be, has always the dignity of its immaculate purity, of its unswerving judgment, of its obstinate determination to deal only with the best. A hard task to judge between them. But be this as it may, it is one of the singular richesses of the Italian Renaissance that it knew of both tendencies; that while in painting it gave the equivalent of that rigid idealism of the Greeks which can make no compromise with ugliness; in sculpture it possessed the equivalent of the realism of Velasquez, which can make beauty out of ugly things, even as the chemist can make sugar out of vitriol.



THE SCHOOL OF BOIARDO.



## THE SCHOOL OF BOIARDO.



“Le donne, i cavalier, l'armi, gli amori.”

### I.

THROUGHOUT the tales of Charlemagne and his warriors, overtopping by far the crowd of paladins and knights, move two colossal mailed and vizored figures—Roland, whom the Italians call Orlando and the Spaniards Roldan, the son of Milon d'Angers and of Charlemagne's sister ; and Renaud or Rinaldo, the lord of Montauban, and eldest of the famous four sons of Aymon. These are the two representative heroes, equal but opposed, the Achilles and Odysseus, the Siegfried and Dietrich, of the Carolingian epic ; and in each is personified, by the unconscious genius of the early Middle Ages, one of the great political movements, of the heroic struggles, of feudalism. For there existed in feudalism two forces, a centripetal and a centrifugal—a force which made for the supremacy of the kingly overlordship, and a force which made for the independence of the great vassals.

Hence, in the poetry which is the poetry of feudalism, two distinct currents of feeling, two distinct epics—the epic of the devoted loyalty of all the heroes of France to their wise and mighty emperor Charlemagne, triumphant even in misfortune ; and the epic of the hopeless resistance against a craven and capricious despot Charles of the most righteous and whole-hearted among his feudatories : the epic of Roland, and the epic of Renaud. Of the first there remains to us, in its inflexible and iron solemnity, an original rhymed narrative, “The Chanson de Roland,” which we may read perhaps almost in the selfsame words in which it was sung by the Normans of William in their night watch before the great battle. The centripetal force of feudalism gained the upper hand, and the song of the great empire, of the great deeds of loyal prowess, was consecrated in the feudal monarchy. The case was different with the tale of resistance and rebellion. The story of Renaud soon became a dangerous lesson for the great barons ; it fell from the hands of the nobles to those of humbler folk ; and it is preserved to us no longer in mediæval verse, but in a prose version, doubtless of the fifteenth century, under the name, familiar on the stalls of village fairs, of “Les Quatre Fils Aymon.” But, as Renaud is the equal of Roland, so is this humble prose tale nevertheless the equal of the great song of Roncevaux ; and even now, it would be a difficult task to decide which were the grander, the tale of loyalty or the tale of resistance.

In each of these tales, the "Chanson de Roland" and the "Quatre Fils Aymon," there is contained a picture of its respective hero, which sums up, as it were, the whole noble character of the book ; and which, the picture of the dying Roland and the picture of the dying Renaud, I would fain bring before you before speaking of the other Roland and the other Renaud, the Orlando of Ariosto and the Rinaldo of Boiardo. The traitor Ganelon has enabled King Marsile to overtake with all his heathenness the rear-guard of Charlemagne between the granite walls of Roncevaux ; the Franks have been massacred, but the Saracens have been routed ; Roland has at last ceded to the prayers of Oliver and of Archbishop Turpin ; three times has he put to his mouth his oliphant and blown a blast to call back Charlemagne to vengeance, till the blood has foamed round his lips and his temple has burst. Oliver is dead, the Archbishop is dying, Roland himself is slowly bleeding to death. He goes down into the defile, heaped with corpses, and seeks for the bodies of the principal paladins, Ivon and Ivaire, the Gascon Engelier, G erier and G erin, B erenger and Otho, Anseis and Salamon, and the old Gerard of Rousillon ; and one by one drags them to where the Archbishop lies dying. And then, when to these knights Roland has at last added his own beloved comrade Oliver, he bids the Archbishop bless all the dead, before he die himself. Then, when he has reverently crossed Turpin's beautiful priestly hands over

his breast, he goes forth to shatter his sword Durendal against the rocks ; but the good sword has cut the rock without shivering ; and the coldness of death steals over Roland. He stretches himself upon a hillock looking towards Spain, and prays for the forgiveness of his sins ; then, with Durendal and his ivory horn by his side, he stretches out the glove of his right hand to God. " He has stretched forth to God the glove of his right hand ; St. Gabriel has received it. Then his head has sunk on his arm ; he has gone, with clasped hands, to his end. God sends him one of his cherubim and St. Michael of Peril. St. Gabriel has come with them. They carry the soul of the Count up to paradise."

More solitary, and solemn and sad even, is the end of the other hero, of the great rebel Renaud of Montauban. At length, after a lifetime wasted in fruitless attempts to resist the iniquity of the emperor, to baffle his power, to shame him by magnanimity into justice, the four sons of Aymon, who have given up their youth, their manhood, the dearest things to their heart, respect to their father and loyalty to their sovereign, rather than countenance the injustice of Charlemagne to their kinsman, have at last obtained to be pardoned ; to be pardoned, they, heroes, by a dastardly tyrant, and to quietly sink, broken-hearted into nothingness. The eldest, Renaud, returning from exile and the Holy Land, finds that his wife Clarisse has pined for him and died ; and then, putting

away his armour from him, and dressing in a pilgrim's frock made of the purple serge of the dead lady's robe, he goes forth to wander through the world ; not very old in years, but broken-spirited ; at peace, but in solitude of heart. And one evening he arrives at Cologne. We can imagine the old knight, only half aware of the sunshine of the evening, the noise of the streets, the looks of the crowd, the great minster rising half-finished in the midst of the town by the Rhine, the cries and noise and chipping of the masons ; unconscious of all this, half away : with his brothers hiding in the Ardennes, living on roots and berries, at bay before Charlemagne ; or wandering ragged and famishing through France ; with King Yon brilliant at Toulouse, seeing perhaps for the first time his bride Clarisse, or the towers of Montauban rising under the workmen's hands ; thinking perhaps of the frightful siege, when all, all had been eaten in the fortress, and his children Aymonnet and Yonnet, all thin and white, knelt down and begged him to slaughter his horse Bayard that they might eat ; perhaps of that journey, when he and his brothers, all in red-furred robes with roses in their hands, rode prisoners of King Charles across the plain of Vaucouleurs ; perhaps of when he galloped up to the gallows at Montfaucon, and cut loose his brother Richard ; or of that daring ride to Paris, where he and his horse won the race, snatched the prize from before Charlemagne and sped off crying out that the winner was Renaud of

Montauban ; or, perhaps, seeing once more the sad, sweet face of the Lady Clarisse, when she had burned all her precious stuffs and tires in the castle-yard, and lay dead without him to kiss her cold mouth ; of seeing once more his good horse Bayard, when he kissed him in his stall before giving him to be killed by Charlemagne. Thinking of all that past, seeing it all within his mind, and seeing but little of the present ; as, in the low yellow light, he helped, for his bread, the workmen to heave the great beams, to carry the great stones of the cathedral, to split the huge marble masses while they stared in astonished envy ; as he sat, unconscious of their mutterings, eating his dry bread and porridge in the building docks by the river. And then, when wearied, he had sunk to sleep in the hay-loft, dreaming perchance that all this evil life was but a dream and the awakening therefrom to happiness and strength ; the jealous workmen came and killed him with their base tools, and cast him into the Rhine. They say that the huge body floated on the water, surrounded by a great halo ; and that when the men of the banks, seeing this, reverently fished it out, they found that the noble corpse was untouched by decay, and still surrounded by a light of glory. And thus, it seems to me, this Renaud, this rebel baron of whose reality we know nothing, has floated surrounded by a halo of poetry down the black flood of the Middle Ages (in which so much has sunk) ; and when we look upon his face,

and see its beauty and strength and solemnness, we feel, like the people of the Rhine bank, inclined to weep, and to say of this mysterious corpse, "Surely this is some great saint."

Of each of these heroes thus shown us by the Middle Ages, the Italian Renaissance also, by the hand of two of her greatest poets, has given us a picture. And first, of Roland. Of him, of Count Orlando, we are told by Messer Lodovico Ariosto, that in consequence of his having discovered, in a certain pleasant grotto among the ferns and maidenhair, words graven on the rock (interrupted, doubtless, by the lover's kisses) which revealed that the Princess Angelica of Cathay had disdained him for Medoro, the fair-haired page of the King of the Moors; Count Orlando went straightway out of his mind, and hanging up his armour and stripping off his clothes, galloped about on his bare-backed horse, slaughtering cows and sheep instead of Saracens; until it pleased God, moved by the danger of Christendom and the prayers of Charlemagne, to permit Astolfo to ride on the hippogriff's back up to the moon, and bring back thence the wits of the great paladin contained in a small phial. We all know that merry tale. What the Renaissance has to say of Renaud of Montauban is even stranger and more fantastic. One day, says Matteo Boiardo, in the fifteenth canto of the second part of his "Orlando Innamorato," as Rinaldo of Montalbano, the contemner of love, was riding in the Ardennes, he came to a

clearing in the forest, where, close to the fountain of Merlin, a wonderful sight met his eyes. On a flowery meadow were dancing three naked damsels, and singing with them danced also a naked youth, dark of eyes and fair of hair, the first down on his lips, so that some might have said it was and others that it was not there. On Rinaldo's approach they broke through their singing and dancing, and rushed upon him, pelting him with roses and hyacinths and violets from their baskets, and beating him with great sheaves of lilies, which burnt like flames through the plates of his armour to the very marrow of his bones. Then when they had dragged him, tied with garlands, by the feet round and round the meadow; wings, eyed not with the eyes of a peacock but with the eyes of lovely damsels, suddenly sprouted out of their shoulders, and they flew off, leaving the poor baron, bruised on the grass, to meditate upon the vanity of all future resistance to love.

Such are the things which the Middle Ages and the Renaissance found to tell us of the two great heroes of Carolingian poetry. And the explanation of how it came to pass, that for the Roland of the song of Roncevaux was substituted the Orlando of Ariosto, and for the Renaud of "Les Quatre Fils Aymon" the Rinaldo of Matteo Boiardo—means simply that which I desire here to study: the metamorphoses of mediæval romance stuffs, and, more especially, the vicissitudes of the cycle of Charlemagne.

## II.

We are apt to think of the Middle Ages as if they were the companion-piece to Antiquity ; but no such ideal correspondence exists between the two periods. Antiquity is all of a piece, and the Middle Ages, on the contrary, are heterogeneous and chaotic. For Antiquity is the steady and uniform development of civilization in one direction and with one meaning ; there are great differences between its various epochs, but they are as the differences between the budding, the blossoming, and the fading stages of one plant : life varies, but is one. The Middle Ages, on the other hand, are a series of false starts, of interruptions and of new departures ; a perpetual confusion. For, if we think over them, we shall see that these centuries called mediæval are occupied by the effort of one people, or one generation, to put to rights and settle down among as much as it can save of the civilization of Antiquity. And the sudden overwhelming of this people or this generation by another, which puts all the elaborate arrangements into disarray, adds to the ruins of Antiquity the ruins of more recent times ; and then this destroying generation tries to put things straight, to settle down, and is in its turn interrupted by the advent of some new comer who begins the game afresh.

As it is with peoples, so also is it with ideas ; scarcely has a scheme of life or of philosophy or of art

taken shape and consistence before, from out of the inexhaustible chaos of mediæval thought and feeling, there issue new necessities, new aspirations, which put into confusion all previous ones. The Middle Ages were like some financial crisis: a little time, a little credit, money will fructify, wealth will reappear, the difficult moment will be tided over; and so with civilization. But unfortunately the wealth of ideas began to accumulate in the storehouse only just long enough to bring down a rout of creditors, people who rifled the bank, and went home to consume or invest their money in order to be succeeded by others. Hence, in the matter of civilization, the Middle Ages ended in an extraordinary slow ruin, a bankruptcy like that which overtook France before '89, and from which, as France was restored by the bold seizure and breaking up of property of the revolution, the world was restored by the bold breaking of feudal and spiritual mortmain, the restoring of wasted energies to utility, of that great double revolution, the Renaissance and the Reformation. Be this as it may, mankind throughout the Middle Ages appears to have been in a chronic condition of packing up and unpacking, and packing up again; one after another a nation, a race, a philosophy, a political system came to the front and was pushed back again into limbo: Germans and Kelts and Latins, French civilization of the day of Abélard, Provençal civilization of the days of the Raymonds, brilliant and evanescent

Hohenstauffen supremacy, papacy at Canossa and at Avignon, Templars triumphant and Templars persecuted ; scholasticism, mysticism, feudalism, democracy, communism : influences all these perpetually rising up and being trodden down, till they all rotted away in the great stagnation of the fifteenth century ; and only in one part of the world, where the conflict was more speedily ended, where one set of tendencies early triumphed, where stability was temporarily obtained, in Italy alone did civilization continue to be nurtured and developed for the benefit of all mankind. In such a state of affairs only such things could flourish and mature as were safe from what I have called, for want of a better expression, the perpetual unpacking and repacking, the perpetual being on the move, of the Middle Ages ; and among such things foremost was art, the essential art of the times, architecture, which, belonging to the small towns, to the infinite minority of the democracy, who worked and made money and let the great changes pass over their heads, thrived almost as something too insignificant for notice. But it was different with literature. Cathedrals once built cannot so easily be changed ; new peoples, new ideas, must accept them. But poetry—the thing which every nation insists upon having to suit its own taste, the thing which every nation and every generation carries about with it hither and thither, the thing which can be altered to suit every passing whim—poetry was, of all the fluctuating things of the Middle

Ages, perhaps the most fluctuating of all. And fluctuating also because, as none of these various nations, tendencies, aspirations, dominated sufficiently long to produce any highly organized art, there remained no standard works, nothing recognizedly perfect, which would be kept for its perfection and gather round it imitations, so as to form the nucleus of any homogeneous tradition. The Middle Ages, so full of fashions in literary matters, possessed no classics; the minnesingers knew nothing of the stern old Teutonic war songs; the meistersängers had forgotten the minnesingers; the trouvères and troubadours knew nothing of the "Chanson de Roland," and Villon knew nothing of them. Only in Italy, where the Middle Ages came to an end and the Renaissance began with the Lombard league, was there established a tradition of excellence, with men like Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, handed down from generation to generation; even as, while in the north there came about the strange modification which substituted the French of Rabelais for the French of Chrestien de Troyes, the German of Luther for the German of Wolfram von Eschenbach, the Italian language, from Ciullo d'Alcamo almost to Boiardo and Lorenzo dei Medici, remained virtually identical. The result of this, which I may call the heterogeneousness and instability of the Middle Ages, was that not merely literary forms were for ever arising and being superseded, but literary subject matter was continually undergoing a process

of transformation. While in Antiquity the great epic and tragic stuffs remained well-nigh unaltered, and the stories of Valerius Flaccus and Apollonius Rhodius were merely the stories which had been current since the days of Homer; during the course of the Middle Ages every epic cycle, and every tale belonging thereunto, was gradually adulterated, mingled with, swamped by, some other cycle or tale, nay, rather, every other cycle and every other tale, the older ones trying to save their popularity by admixture with the more recent, till at last all mythical significance, all historical meaning, all national character, all psychological reality, were lost in the chaotic result. And meanwhile, in the absence of any stable language, of any durable literary fashion, the Middle Ages were unable to give to these epic stuffs, at any one period of their life of metamorphose, a form sufficiently artistically valuable to secure anything beyond momentary vogue, to secure for them the immortality of the great Greek tales of adventure and warfare and love. Thus it came about that the epic cycle of Charlemagne, after supplanting in men's minds the grand sagas of the pagan North, was itself supplanted by the Arthurian cycle; that the Frankish stories absorbed the wholly discrepant elements of their more fortunate Keltic rivals; that both cycles, having lost all character through fusion and through obliteration by time, became more meaningless generation by generation and year by year, until when the

Middle Ages had come to an end, and the great poets of the Renaissance were ready to give this old mediæval epic stuff a definitive and durable artistic shape, there came to the hands of Boiardo and Ariosto, of Tasso and Spenser, only a strange, trumpery material, muddled by jongleurs and romance writers, and reduced to mere fairy stuff, taken seriously only by Don Quixote, and by the authors of the volumes of insane twaddle called after Amadis of Gaul and all his kinsmen.

Such a condition of perpetual change as explains, in my belief, why the mediæval epic subjects were wanted, can be made clear only by examples. I shall therefore try to show the transformations which were undergone by one or two principal mediæval epic subjects as a result of a mixture with other epic cycles; of a gradual adaptation to a new state of civilization; and finally of their gradual separation from all kind of reality and real interests.

First of all, let us look at the epic cycle, which, although known to us only in poems no older than those of the trouvères and minnesingers who sang of Charlemagne and Arthur, is in reality far more ancient, and on account of its antiquity and its consequent disconnection with mediæval religious and political interests, was thrown aside even by the nations to which it belonged, by the Scandinavians who took to writing sagas about the wars of Charlemagne against Saracens, and by the Germans who

preferred to hear the adventures of Welsh and Breton Launcelots and Tristrams. I am alluding to the stories connected with the family and life of the hero called Sigurd by the Scandinavians, and Siegfried by the Germans. Of these we possess a Norse version called the Volsunga Saga, magnificently done into English by Mr. William Morris; which, although written down at the end of the twelfth century, in the very time therefore of Chrestien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Gottfried von Strassburg, and subsequently to the presumed writing of the "Chanson de Roland" and the Nibelungenlied, shows us in reality the product of a people, the distant Scandinavians of Iceland, who were five or six hundred years behind the French, Germans, and English of the twelfth century. In the Volsunga Saga, neither Christianity nor feudalism is yet dreamed of; and it is for this reason that I wish to compare it with the Nibelungenlied, in order to show how enormously the old epic stuff was altered by the new civilization. The whole social and moral condition of the two versions is different. In the old Scandinavian civilization, where the Viking is surrounded and served by clansmen, the feeling of blood relationship is the strongest in people's hearts; strangely and fearfully shown in the introductory tale of Signy, who, in order to avenge her father Volsung, killed by her husband, goes forth, altered in face by magic arts, to the woods to her brother Sigmund, that,

unwittingly, he may beget with her the only man fit to avenge the Volsungs ; and then sends the boy Sinfjotli to the man he has hitherto considered merely as his uncle, bidding the latter kill him if he prove unworthy of his incestuous birth, or train him to vengeance. The three together murder the husband and legitimate children of Signy, and set the palace on fire ; which, being done, the queen, having accomplished her duty to her kin, accomplishes that towards her husband, and calmly returns to die in the burning hall. Here (and apparently again in the case of the children of Sigurd and Brynhilt) incest becomes a family virtue. This being the frightful preponderance of the feeling of blood relationship, it is quite natural that the Scandinavian Chriemhilt (called in the *Volsunga Saga*, Gudrun) should not resent the murder of her husband Siegfried or Sigurd by her brothers at the instigation of the jealous Brynhilt (who has in a manner been Sigurd's wife before he made her over to Chriemhilt's eldest brother) ; and that, so far from seeking any revenge against them, she should, when her second husband Atli sends for her brothers in order to rob and murder them, first vainly warn them of the plot, and then, when they have been massacred, kill Atli and her children by him in order to avenge her brothers. The slackening of the tribal feeling, the idea of fidelity in love and sanctity of marriage belonging to Christianity and feudalism, rendered such a story unintelligible to the Germans of the *Othos* and

Henry's. In the *Nibelungenlied*, the whole story of the massacre of the brothers is changed. Chriemhilt never forgives the murder of Siegfried, and it is not Etzel = Atli for the sake of plunder, but she herself for the sake of revenge, who decoys her brothers and murders them; it is she who with her own hand cuts off the head of Gunther to expiate his murder of Siegfried. To our feelings, more akin to those of the feudal Christians of Franconia than to those of the tribal Scandinavians of the *Edda*, the second version is far more intelligible and interesting—the story of this once gentle and loving Chriemhilt, turned by the murder of her beloved into a fury, and plotting to avenge his death by the death of all her kinsfolk, must be much grander and more pathetic than the story of this strange Gudrun, who sits down patiently beneath the injury done to her by her brothers, but savagely avenges them on her new husband, and her own and his innocent children; to us this persistence of tribal feeling, destroying all indignation and love, is merely unnatural, confusing, and repulsive. But this alteration for the better in one of the incidents of the tale is a mere fluke; and the whole main plot of the originally central figures <sup>is</sup> ~~are~~ completely obliterated by the new state of civilization, and rendered merely trivial and grotesque. In the *Volsunga Saga* Sigurd, overcome by enchantments, has forgotten his wife (or mistress, a vague mythical relationship); and, with all sense of the past obliterated, has made her over to the

brother of his new wife Gudrun ; and Brynhilt kills her faithless love to dissolve the second marriage and be reunited with him in death. In the *Nibelungenlied* Siegfried, although the flower of knighthood, conquers by foul play the Amazon Brunhilt to reward Gunther for the hand of his sister ; nay, in a comic and loathsome scene he forces her into the embraces of the craven Gunther ; and then he gets killed by Brunhilt's machinations ; when, after most unqueenly bickerings, the proud Amazon is brutally told by Siegfried's wife of the dirty trick which has given her to Gunther. After this, it is impossible to realize, when Siegfried is murdered and all our sympathies called on to his side, the utterly out-of-character, blackguardly behaviour which has brought the hero to his death. Similarly the conception of the character and position of Brynhilt is entirely disfigured and rendered inane in the *Nibelungenlied* : of that superb demi-goddess of the Scandinavians, burnt on the pyre with her falcons and dogs and horses and slaves, by the side of the demi-god Sigurd, whom she has loved and killed, lest the door of Valhalla, swinging after him, should shut her out from his presence ; of her there remains in the German mediæval poem only a virago (more like the giantesses of the *Amadis romances*) enraged at having been defeated and grotesquely and grossly pummelled into wedlock by a man not her husband, and then slanged like a fishwife by her envious sister-in-law.

The old, consistent, grandly tragic tale of the mysterious incests and revenges of a race of demi-gods has lost its sense, its point in the attempt to arrange it to suit Christian and feudal ideas. The really fine portions of the *Nibelungenlied* are exactly those which have no real connection with the original story, gratuitous additions by mediæval poets: the delicately indicated falling in love of Siegfried and Chriemhilt, the struggles of Markgraf Rüdger between obedience to his feudal superior and fidelity towards his friends and guests; and, above all, the canto of the death of Siegfried. This last is different, intensely different, from the rugged and dreary monotony of the rest; this most poetical, almost Spenserian or Ariostesque realization of the scene; this beautiful picture (though worked with the needle of the arras-worker rather than with pencil or brush) of the wood, the hunt, the solitary fountain in the Odenwald, where, with his spear propped against the lime-tree, Siegfried was struck down into the clover and flowers, and writhed with Hagen's steel through his back. This canto is certainly interpolated by some first-rate poet, at least a Gottfried or a Walther, to whom that passage of the savage old droning song of death had suggested a piece of new art; it is like the fragments of exquisitely chiselled leafage and figures which you sometimes find encrusted—by whom? wherefore?—quite isolated in the midst of the rough and lichen-stained stones of some rude Norman or Lombard

church. All the rest of the Nibelungenlied gives an impression of effateness ; there is no definiteness of idea such as that of the Volsunga Saga ; the battles are mere vague slaughter, no action, no realized movement, or (excepting Rüdger) no realized motive of conduct. Shape and colour would seem to have been obliterated by repetition and alteration. Yet even these alterations could not make the tale of Siegfried survive among the Germans of the Middle Ages ; nay, the more the alterations the less the interest ; the want of consistency and colour due to rearrangement merely accelerated the throwing aside of a subject which, dating from pagan and tribal times, had become repugnant to the new generations. All the mutilations in the world could not make the old Scandinavian tales of betrayed trust, of revenge and triumphant bloodshed, at all sympathetic to men whose religious and social ideals were those of forgiveness and fidelity ; even stripped of its incestuous mysteries and of its fearful tribal love, the tale of Sigurd and Brynhilt, reduced to the tale of Chriemhilt's revenge, was unpalatable : no more attempts were made at re-writing it, and the poems of Walther, of Gottfried, of Wolfram, of Ulrich, and of Tannhäuser, full as they are of references to stories of the Carolingian and Arthurian cycles, nay, to Antique and Oriental tales, contain no allusion to the personages of the Nibelungenlied. The old epic of the Gothic races had been pushed aside by the triumphant epic of the obscure and conquered Kelts.

There are few phenomena in the history of ideas and forms more singular than that of the sudden conquest of the poetry of dominant or distant nations by the poetic subjects of a comparatively small race, sheared of all political importance, restricted to a trifling territory, and well-nigh deprived of their language; and of this there can be found no more striking example than the sudden ousting of the Carolingian epic by the cycle of Arthur.

The Kelts of Britain and Ireland possessed an epic cycle of their own, which came to notice only when they were dispossessed of their last strongholds by Saxons and Normans, and which immediately spread with astounding rapidity all over Europe. The vanquished race became fashionable; themselves, their art and their poetry, began to be sought for as a war-enhanced loot. The heroic tales of the Kelts were transcribed in Welsh, and translated into Latin, by order of the Norman and Angevine kings, glad, it would seem, to oppose the old Briton to the Saxon element. The Keltic songs were carried all over France by Breton bards, to whose music and rhymes, with only a general idea of the subjects, the neo-Latin-speaking Franks listened with the sort of stolid satisfaction with which English or Germans of a hundred years ago listened to Italians singing Metastasio's verses. But soon the songs and tales were translated; and French poets imitated in their language, northern and southern, the graceful metres

of the Keltic lays, and altered and arranged their subjects. So that, in a very short time, France, and through it Germany, was inundated with Keltic stories. This triumph of the vanquished race was not without reason. The Kelts, early civilized by Rome and Christianity, had a set of stories and a set of heroes extremely in accordance with mediæval ideas, and requiring but very little alteration. The considerable age of their civilization had long obliterated all traces of pagan and tribal feeling in their tales. Their heroes, originally, like those of all other people, divinities intimately connected with natural phenomena, had long lost all cosmic characteristics, long ceased to be gods, and, manipulated by the fancy of a race whose greatness was quite a thing of the past, had become a sort of golden age ideals—the men of a distant period of glory, which was adorned with every kind of perfection, till it became as unreal as fairyland. Fairyland, in good sooth, was this country of the Keltic tales ; and there is a sort of symbolical significance in the fact of its lawgiver Merlin, and its emperor Arthur, being both of them not dead, like Sigurd, like Dietrich, like Charlemagne and Roland, but lying in enchanted sleep. Long inaction and the day-dreaming of idleness had refined and idealized the heroes of this Keltic race—a race of brilliant fancy and almost southern mobility, and softened for a long time by contact with Roman colonists and Christian priests. They were not the brutal combatants of an active

fighting age, like the heroes of the Edda and of the Carolingian cycles ; nor had they any particular military work to do, belonging as they did to a people huddled away into inactivity. Their sole occupation was to extend abroad that ideal happiness which reigned in the ideal court of Arthur ; to go forth on the loose and see what ill-conditioned folk there might yet be who required being subdued or taught manners in the happy kingdom which the poor insignificant Kelts connected with some princelet of theirs who centuries before may have momentarily repelled the pagan Saxons. Hence in the Keltic stories, such as they exist in the versions previous to the conquest by the Norman kings, and previous also to any communications with other peoples, the distinct beginning of what was later to be called knight-errantry ; of heroes, creations of an inactive nation, having no special military duties, going forth to do what good they may at random, unforced by any necessity, and following a mere æsthetico-romantic plan of perfecting themselves by deeds of valour to become more worthy of their God, their King, and their Lady : religion, loyalty, and love, all three of them mere æsthetic abstractions, becoming the goal of an essentially æsthetic, unpractical system of self-improvement, such as was utterly incompatible with any real and serious business in life. Idle poetic fancies of an inert people, the Knights of the Round Table have no mission save that of being poetically perfect. Such was the spirit

of Keltic poetry ; and, as it happened, this spirit satisfied the imaginative wants of mediæval society just at the moment when political events diffused in other countries the knowledge of the Arthurian legends. The old Teutonic tales of Sigurd, Gudrun, and Dietrich, had long ceased to appeal, in their mutilated and obliterated condition, to a society to whom tribal feeling and pagan heroism were odious, and whose religion distinctly reproved revenge. These semi-mythological tales had been replaced by another cycle : the purely realistic epic, which had arisen during the struggles between the Christian west against the pagan north-east and the Mohammedan south, and which, originating in the short battle-songs narrating the exploits of the predecessors and help-mates of Charlemagne, had constituted itself into large narratives of which the "Song of Roland" represents the artistic culmination. These narratives of mere military exploits, of the battles of a strong feudal aristocracy animated by feudal loyalty and half-religious, half-patriotic fury against invading heathenness, had perfectly satisfied the men of the earliest Middle Ages, of the times when feudalism was being established and the church being reformed ; when the strong military princelets of the North were embarking with their barons to conquer new kingdoms in England and in Italy and Greece ; when the whole of feudal Europe hurled itself against Asia in the first Crusades. But the condition of things soon altered : the feudal

hierarchy was broken up into a number of semi-independent little kingdoms or principalities, struggling, with the assistance of industrial and mercantile classes, to become absolute monarchies ; princes who had been mere generals became stay-at-home diplomatists, studious of taxation and intrigue, surrounded no longer by armed vassals, but by an essentially urban court, in constant communication with the money-making burghers. Religion, also, instead of being a matter of fighting with infidel invaders, turned to fantastic sectarianism and emotional mysticism. With the sense of futility, of disappointment, attendant on the later Crusades, came also a habit of roaming in strange countries, of isolated adventure in search of wealth or information, a love of the distant, the half-understood, the equivocal ; perhaps even a hankering after a mysterious compromise between the religion of Europe and the religions of the East, such as appears to have existed among the Templars and other Franks settled in Asia.

There was, throughout feudal society, a sort of languor, a morbid longing for something new, now that the old had ceased to be possible or had proved futile ; after the great excitement of the Crusades it was impossible to be either sedately idle or quietly active, even as it is with all of us during the days of weariness and restlessness after some long journey. To such a society the strongly realistic Carolingian epic had ceased to appeal : the tales of

the Welsh and Breton bards, repeated by trouvère and jongleur, troubadour and minnesinger, came as a revelation. The fatigued, disappointed, morbid, imaginative society of the later Crusades recognized in this fairyland epic of a long refined, long idle, nay, effete race, the realization of their own ideal: of activity unhampered by aim or organization, of sentiment and emotion and action quite useless and unnecessary, purely subservient to imaginative gratification. These Arthurs, Launcelots, Tristrams, Kays, and Gawains, fantastic phantoms, were also far more artistically malleable than the iron Rolands, Olivers, and Renauds of earlier days; that unknown kingdom of Britain could much more easily be made the impossible ideal, in longing for which squeamish and lazy minds might refuse all coarser reality. Moreover, those who listened to the tales of chivalry were different from those who had listened to the Carolingian stories; and, therefore, required something different. They were courtiers, and one half of them were women. Now the Carolingian tales, originally battle-songs, sung in camps and castles to mere soldiers, had at first possessed no female characters at all; and when gradually they were introduced, it was in the coarsest barrack or tap-room style. The Keltic tales, on the contrary, whether from national tradition, or rather from longer familiarity with Christian culture and greater idleness of life, naturally made women and women's love the goal of a great

many adventures which an effete nation could no longer ascribe to patriotic movements. But this was not all. The religious feeling of the day was extremely inclined to mysticism, in which æsthetic, erotic, and all kinds of morbid and ill-defined tendencies were united, which was more than anything else tinged with a semi-Asiatic quietism, a longing for the passive ecstasy of Nirvâna. This religious side of mediæval life was also gratified by the Arthurian romances. Oddly enough, there existed an old Welsh or Breton tale about the boy Peredur, who from a complete simpleton became the prince of chivalry, and his many adventures connected with a certain mysterious blood-dripping lance, and a still more mysterious basin or *grail* (an allusion to which is said by M. de la Villemarqué to be contained in the originally Keltic name of Percival), which possessed magic properties akin to those of the purse of Fortunatus, or the pipkin in the story of "Little pot, boil!" The story, whose original mythical meaning had been lost in the several centuries of Christianity, was very decayed and obscure; and the fact of the blood on the lance being that of a murdered kinsman of Peredur, and of the basin containing the head of the same person cut off by Gloucester witches, was evidently insufficient to account for all the mystery with which these objects were surrounded. The French poets of the Middle Ages, strongly imbued with Oriental legends brought back by the Crusaders, saw at a glance the

meaning of the whole story: the lance was the lance with which Longinus had pierced the Saviour's side; the Grail was the cup which had received His blood, nay, it was the cup of the Last Supper. A tale about the preservation of these precious relics by Joseph of Arimathæa, was immediately connected therewith; a theory was set up (doubtless with the aid of quite unchristian, Oriental legends) of a kind of kingdom of the keepers of the Grail, of a vague half-material, half-spiritual state of bliss connected with the service of the Grail, which fed its knights (and here the Templars and their semi-oriental mysteries, for which they were later so frightfully misused, certainly come into play) with food which is at once of the body and of the soul. Thus the Keltic Peredur, bent upon massacring the Gloucester witches to avenge his uncle, was turned into a saintly knight, seeking throughout a more and more perfect life for the kingdom of the Grail: the Perceval of Chrestien de Troyes, the Parzifal of Wolfram von Eschenbach, whom later romance writers (wishing to connect everything more closely with Arthur's court) replaced by the Sir Galahad of the "Morte d'Arthur," while the quest of the Grail became a sort of general mission of several knights, a sort of spiritual crusade to whose successful champions Percival, Bors, and Galahad, the Middle Ages did not hesitate to add the arch-adulterer Launcelot.

Thus did the Arthurian tales answer the requirements of the languid, dreamy, courtly, lady-serving

and religiously mystic sons and grandsons of those earlier Crusaders whose aspirations had been expressed by the rough and solemn heroes of Carolingian tales. The Carolingian tales were thrown aside, or were kept by the noble mediæval poets only on condition of their original meaning being completely defaced by wholesale admixture of the manners and adventures belonging to the Arthurian cycles. The paladins were forced to disport themselves in the same fairy-land as the Knights of the Round Table ; and many mediæval poems the heroes of which, like Ogier of Denmark and Huon of Bordeaux, already existed in the Carolingian tales, are in reality, with their romantic loves, their useless adventures, their Morgana's castles and Oberon's horns, offshoots of the Keltic stories, which were as rich in every kind of supernatural (being, in fact, pagan myths turned into fairy tales) as the genuine Carolingian subjects, whose origin was entirely historical, were completely devoid of such things. Arthur and his ladies and knights : Guenevere, Elaine, Enid, Yseult, Launcelot, Geraint, Kay, Gawain, Tristram, and Percival-Galahad, were the real heroes and heroines of the courtly nobles and the courtly poets of this second phase of mediæval life. The Teuton Charlemagne, Roland and Oliver were as completely forgotten of the poets who met in that memorable combat of the Wartburg, as were the Teuton Sigurd and Dietrich. And if the Carolingian cycle survived, however much altered, I think it must

have been thanks to the burghers and artizans of the Netherlands and of Provence, to whom the bluff, matter-of-fact heroism, the simple, gross, but not illegitimate amours of Carolingian heroes, were more satisfactory than any mystic quest of the Grail, any refined adultery of Guenevere or Yseult.

But the inevitable fate of all mediæval epics awaited this triumphant Arthurian cycle: the fate of being obliterated by passing from one nation and civilization to another, long before the existence of any poetic art adequate to its treatment. Of this I will take as an example one of the mediæval poems which has the greatest reputation, the masterpiece (according to most critics, with whom I find it difficult, in the presence of a poet like Göttfried von Strassburg, to agree) of probably the most really poetical and earnest school of poetry which the pre-Dantesque Middle Ages possessed—the “Parzifal” of Wolfram von Eschenbach.

The paramount impression (I cannot say the strongest, for strong impressions are incompatible with such work as this) left by the masterpiece of Wolfram von Eschenbach, is that of the most astonishing vagueness, fluidity, haziness, vaporousness. In reading it one looks back to that rudely hewn and extremely obliterated Nibelungenlied, as to something quite astonishingly clear, detailed and strongly marked as to something distinctly artistic. Indeed by the side of “Parzifal” everything seems artistic; Hartmann von Aue reads like Chaucer, “Aucassin et

Nicolette" is as living as "Cymbeline," "Chevy Chase" seems as good as the battles of Homer. It is not a narrative, but a vague mooning; a knight illiterate, not merely like his fellow minnesingers, in the way of reading and writing, but in the sense of complete absence of all habit of literary form; extremely noble and pure of mind, chaste, gentle, with a funny, puzzled sense of humour, reminding one distantly of Jean Paul in his drowsy moments; a hanger-on of courts, but perfectly simple-hearted and childlike; very poor and easily pleased: such is, for good and for bad, Herr Wolfram von Eschenbach, the only real personality in his poem. And he narrates, in a mooning, digressive, good-natured, drowsy tone, with only a rare awaking of interest, a story which he has heard from some one else, and that some one else from a series of other some one elses (Chrestien de Troyes, a legendary Provençal Chiot or Guyot, perhaps even the original Welsh bard); all muddled, monotonous, and droning; events and persons ill-defined, without any sense of the relative importance of anything, without clear perception of what it is all about, or at least without the power of keeping the matter straight before the reader. A story, in point of fact, which is no story at all, but a mere series of rambling adventures (adventures which are scarcely adventures, having no point or plot) of various people with not much connection and no individuality—Gachmuret, Parzifal, Gawain, Loherangrein, Anfortas, Feirefis—pale ghosts

of beings, moving in a country of Kennaqwhere, Aquitaine, Anjou, Brittany, Wales, Spain, and heaven knows what wondrous Oriental places; a misty country with woods and towns and castles which are infinitely far apart and yet quite near each other; which seem to sail about like cloud castles round the only solid place in the book, Plimizöl, where Arthur's court, with round table constantly spread, is for ever established. A no place, nowhere; yet full of details: minute inventories of the splendid furniture of castles (castles where? how reached?); infinitely inferior in this matter even to the Nibelungenlied, where you are made to feel so vividly (one of the few modern and therefore clear things therein) the long, dreary road from Worms to Bechlarn, and thence to Etzelburg, though of none of them is there anything beyond a name. For the Nibelungen story had been localized in what to narrator and audience was a reality, the country in which themselves lived, where themselves might seek out the abbey in which Siegfried was buried, the well in the Odenwald near which he was stabbed; where they knew from merchant and pilgrim the road taken by the Nibelungs from Santen to Worms, by the Burgundians from Worms to Hungary. But here in "Parzifal" we are in a mere vague world of anywhere, the world of Keltic and Oriental romance become mere cloudland to the Thuringian knight. And similarly have the heroes of other nations, the Arthurs, Gawains, Gachmurets, of Wales and Anjou,

become mere vague names ; they have become liquified, lost all shape and local habitation. They are mere names, these ladies and knights of Herr Wolfram, names with fair pink and white faces, names magnificently draped in bejewelled Oriental stuffs and embossed armour ; they have no home, no work, nothing to do. This is the most remarkable characteristic of "Parzifal," and what makes it so typical of the process of growing inane through overmuch alteration, which prevented the mediæval epics ever turning into an Iliad or an Odyssey ; this that it is essentially idle and all about nothing. The feudal relations strongly marked in the German Nibelungenlied have melted away like the distinctions of race : every knight is independent, not a vassal nor a captain, a Volker or Hagen, or Roland or Renaud followed by his men ; but an isolated individual, without even a squire, wandering about alone through this hazy land of nowhere. Knight-errantry, in the time of the great Guelph and Ghibelline struggles, every bit as ideal as that of Spenser or Cervantes ; and with the difference that Sir Calidore and Sir Artegall have an appointed task, some Blatant Beast or other nuisance to overcome ; and that Don Quixote has the general rescuing of all the oppressed Princesse Micomiconas, and the destruction of all windmills, and the capturing of all helmets of Mambrino, and the establishing all over the world of the worship of Dulcinea. But these knights of Wolfram von Eschenbach have no more

this mission than they have the politico-military missions of a Rüdger or a Roland. They are all riding about at random, without any particular pagans, necromancers, or dragons to pursue. The very service of the Holy Grail, which is the main interest of the poem, consists in nothing apparently except living virtuously at the Castle of Montselväsche, and virtuously eating and drinking the victuals provided miraculously. To be admitted to this service, no initiation, no mission, nothing preliminary seems required. Parzifal himself merely wanders about vaguely, without doing any specified thing. The fact is that in this poem all has become purely ideal ; ideal to the point of utter vacuity : there is no connection with any human business. Of all the heroes and heroines we hear that they are perfectly chaste, truthful, upright ; and they are never put into any situation to test these qualities : they are never placed in the way of temptation, never made to fight with evil, or to decide between it and good. The very religion of the Holy Grail consists in doing nothing : not a word about relieving the poor or oppressed, of tending the sick, of delivering the Holy Sepulchre, of defending that great injured One, Christ. To be Grail Knight or even Grail King means to be exactly the same as before. Where in this vague dreamland of passive purity and heroism, of untempted chastity and untried honour, where are the earthly trials of Tristram, of Guenevere, of Rüdger, of Renaud ? Where the moral

struggles of the Middle Ages? Where is Godfrey, or Francis, or Dominick? Nowhere. All has disappeared, melted away; Christianity and Paganism themselves have melted away or into each other, as in the easy meeting of the Pagan Feirefis and the Christian Parzifal, and in the double marriage of Gachmuret with the Indian Belakane and the Welsh Herzeloid; there remains only a kind of Buddhistic Nirvâna of vague passive perfection, but without any renunciation; and in a world devoid of evil and full of excellent brocade and armour and eatables, and lovely maidens who dress and undress you, and chastely kiss you on the mouth; a world without desire, aspiration, or combat, vacantly happy and virtuous. A world purely ideal, divorced from all reality, unsubstantial like the kingdom of Gloriana, but, unlike Spenser's, quite unshadowed by any puritan sadness, by any sense of evil, untroubled by allegorical vices; cheerful, serene, filled with flowers and song of birds, but as unreal as the illuminated arabesques of a missal. In truth, perhaps more to be compared with an eighteenth century pastoral, an ideal created almost in opposition to reality; a dream of passiveness and liberty (as of light leaves blown about) as the ideal of the fiercely troubled, struggling, tightly fettered feudal world. The ideal, perhaps, of only one moment, scarcely of a whole civilization; or rather (how express my feeling?) an accidental combination of an instant, as of spectre vapour arisen from the mixture of Kelt and Teuton, of Frank and Moslem. Is it

Christian, Pagan, Mohammedan? None of all these. A simple-looking vaporous chaos of incongruous, but not conflicting, elements: a poem of virtue without object, of knighthood without work, of religion without dogma; in this like its central interest, the Grail: a mystery, a cup, a stone; a thing which heals, feeds, speaks; animate or inanimate? Stone of the Caaba or chalice of the Sacrament? Merely a mysterious holy of holies and good of goods, which does everything and nothing, means nothing and requires nothing; is nothing.

### III.

Thus was obliterated, in all its national and traditional meaning, the heroic cycle of Arthur; and by the same process of slow adaptation to new intellectual requirements which had completely wiped out of men's memory the heroic tales of Siegfried, which had entirely altered the originally realistic character of the epic of Charlemagne. But unreal and ideal as had become the tales of the Round Table, and disconnected with any national tradition, the time came when even these were not sufficiently independent of reality to satisfy the capricious imagination of the later Middle Ages. At the end of the fourteenth century was written, most probably in Portuguese by Vasco de Lobeira, the tale of "Amadis de Gaula," which was followed by some forty or fifty similar books telling the adventures of all the brothers, nephews, sons, grand-

sons, and great-grandsons, an infinite succession, of the original Amadis; which, translated into all languages and presently multiplied by the press, seem to have usurped the place of the Arthurian stories in feudal countries until well-nigh the middle of the sixteenth century; and which were succeeded by no more stories of heroes, but by the realistic comic novels of the type of "Lazarillo de Tormes," and the buffoon philosophic extravaganzas of "Gargantua." Further indeed it was impossible to go than did mediæval idealism in the Amadis. Compared with them the most fairy-tale-like Arthurian stories are perfect historical documents. There remains no longer any connection whatsoever with reality, historical or geographical: the whole world seems to have been expeditiously emptied of all its contents, to make room for kingdoms of Gaul, of Rome, of the Firm Island, of Sobradisa, etc., which are less like the Land West of the Moon and East of the Sun than they are like Sancho Panza's island. All real mankind, past, present, and future, has similarly been swept away and replaced by a miraculous race of Amadis, Lisvarts, Galaors, Gradasilias, Orianas, Pintiquinestras, Fradalons, and so forth, who flit across our vision, in company with the indispensable necromancers, fairies, dwarfs, giants, and duennas, like some huge ballet: things without character, passions, pathos; knights who are never wounded or killed, princesses who always end with marrying the right man, enchanters whose heads

are always chopped off, foundlings who are always reinstated in their kingdom, inane paper puppets bespangled with impossible sentiment, tinsel and rags which are driven about like chaff by the wind-puffs of romance. The advent of the Amadis is the coming of the Kingdom of Nonsense, the sign that the last days of chivalric romance have come ; a little more, and the Licentiate Alonzo Perez will take his seat in Don Quixote's library, and Nicholas the Barber light his faggots in the yard.

But, as if in compensation of the usurpation of which they had been the victims, the Carolingian tales, pushed out of the way by the Arthurian cycle, were not destined to perish. Thrown aside with contempt by the upper classes, who were engrossed by the Round Table and the Holy Grail, the tales of Charlemagne and his paladins, largely adulterated with Arthurian elements, were apparently cherished by a lower class of society: burgesses, artizans, and such-like, for whom that Arthurian world was far too ethereal and too delicately immoral ; and to this circumstance is due the fact that the humiliated Carolingian tales eventually received an artistic embodiment which was not given to the Arthurian stories. While troubadours and minnesingers were busy with the court of Arthur, and grave Latinists like Rusticiano of Pisa wrote of Launcelot and Guenevere ; the Carolingian epics seem to have been mainly sung about by illiterate jongleurs, and to have busied the pens of prose hack-

writers for the benefit of townfolk. The free towns of the Netherlands and of Germany appear to have been full of this unfashionable literature: the Carolingian cycle had become democratic. And, inasmuch as it was literature no longer for knights and courtiers, but for artizans and shopkeepers, it went, of course, to the pre-eminently democratic country of the Middle Ages—Italy. This was at a time when Italian was not yet a recognized language, and when the men and women who talked in Tuscan, Lombard, or Venetian dialects, wrote in Latin and in French. And while Francesca and Paolo read the story of Launcelot most probably in good mediæval *langue d'oïl*, as befitted people of high birth; the jongleurs, who collected crowds so large as to bar the streets and require the interference of the Bolognese magistrates, sang of Roland and Oliver in a sort of *lingua Franca* of French Lombard. French jongleurs singing in impossible French-Italian; Italian jongleurs singing in impossible French; Paduan penny-a-liners writing Carolingian cyclical novels in French, not of Paris, assuredly, but of Padua—a comical and most hideous jabber of hybrid languages—this was how the Carolingian stories became popular in Italy. Meanwhile, the day came when the romantic Arthurian tales had to dislodge in Italy before the invasion of the classic epic. Troy, Rome, and Thebes had replaced Tintagil and Caerleon in the interest of the cultured classes long before the beginning of the

fifteenth century; when Poggio, in the very midst of the classic revival, still told of the comically engrossed audience which surrounded the vagabonds singing of Orlando and Rinaldo. The effete Arthurian cycle, superseded in Spain and France by the Amadis romances, was speedily forgotten in Italy; but the Carolingian stories remained; and when Italian poetry arose once more after the long interregnum between Petrarch and Lorenzo dei Medici, and looked about for subjects, it laid its hand upon them. But when, in the second half of the fifteenth century, those old tales of Charlemagne received, after so many centuries of alterations and ephemeral embodiments, that artistic form which the Middle Ages had been unable to give them, the stories themselves, and the way in which they were regarded, were totally different from what they had been in the time of Théroulde, or of the anonymous author of the "Quatre Fils Aymon;" the Renaissance, with its keen artistic sense, made out of the Carolingian tales real works of art, but works of art which were playthings. To begin with, the Carolingian stories had been saturated with Arthurian colour: they had been furnished with all the knight-errantry, all the gallantry, all the enchantments, the fairies, giants, and necromancers of the Keltic legends; and, moreover, they had lost, by infinite repetition, all the political realism and meaning so striking in the "Chanson de Roland" and the "Quatre Fils Aymon;" a confusion and unreality further increased by the

fact that the Italians had no original connection with those tales, that to them real men and plans were no better than imaginary ones, and that the minstrels who sang in the market-place, and the laborious prose-writers who compiled such collections as that called of the "Reali di Francia," were equally free in their alterations and adaptations, creating unknown relationships, inventing new adventures, suppressing essential historical points, with no object save amusing their audience or readers with new stories about familiar heroes. Such was the condition of the stories themselves. The attitude of the public towards them was, by the middle of the fifteenth century, one of complete incredulity and frivolous amusement; the paladins were as unreal as the heroes of any granny's fairy tale. The people wanted to hear of wonderful battles and adventures, of enchantments and love-makings; but they wanted also to laugh; and, sceptical, practical, democratic, the artizans and shopkeepers of Florence—to whom, paying, as they did, expensive mercenaries who stole poultry and never got wounded on any account, all chivalry or real military honour was the veriest nursery rubbish — such people as crowded round the *cantastoria* of *mercato vecchio*, must indeed have found much to amuse them in these tales of so different an age.

And into such crowds there penetrated to listen and watch (even as the Magnificent Lorenzo had elbowed among the carnival ragamuffins of Florence, and had

slid in among the holiday-making peasants of Poggio a Caiano) a learned man, a poet, an intimate of the Medicis, of Politian, Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola, Messer Luigi Pulci, the same who had written the semi-allegorical, semi-realistic poem about Lorenzo dei Medici's gala tournament. There was a taste in the house of the Medici, together with the taste for platonic philosophy, classical erudition, religious hymns, and Hebrew kabbala, for a certain kind of realism, for the language and mode of thinking of the lower classes, as a reaction from Petrarchesque conventionality. As the Magnificent Lorenzo had had the fancy to string together in more artistic shape the quaint and graceful love poems, hyperbolic, realistic, tender, and abusive, of the Tuscan peasantry; so also Messer Luigi Pulci appears to have been smitten with the notion of trying his hand at a chivalric poem like those to which he and his friends had listened among the butchers and pork-shops, the fishmongers and frying booths of the market, and giving an impression, in its ideas and language, of the people to whom such strains were sung. But Luigi Pulci was vastly less gifted as a poet than Lorenzo dei Medici; Florentine prentices are less æsthetically pleasing than Tuscan peasants, and the "Morgante Maggiore" is a piece of work of a sort utterly inferior to the "Nencia da Barberino." Still the "Morgante Maggiore" remains, and will remain, as a very remarkable production of grotesque art. Just as Lorenzo dei Medici was certainly not

without a deliberate purpose of selecting the quaintness and gracefulness of peasant life ; even so, and perhaps more, Luigi Pulci must have had a deliberate intention of producing a ludicrous effect ; in both cases the deliberate attempt is very little perceptible, in the "Nencia da Barberino" from the genius of Lorenzo, in the "Morgante Maggiore" from the stolidity of Pulci. The "Morgante," of which parts were probably written as a mere sample to amuse a supper party, became interesting to Pulci, in the mere matter of inventing and stringing together new incidents ; and despite its ludicrous passages, it must have been more seriously written by him, and more seriously listened to by his friends, than would a similar production now-a-days. For the men of the Renaissance, no matter how philosophized and cultured, retained the pleasure in mere incident, which we moderns seem to have given over to children and savages ; and Lorenzo, Ficino, and Politian probably listened to the adventures of Luigi Pulci's paladins and giants with much the same interest, and only a little more conscious sense of grotesqueness, with which the crowd in the market listened to Cristofano dell' Altissimo and similar story-tellers. The "Morgante Maggiore," therefore, is neither really comic nor really serious. It is not a piece of realistic grotesqueness like "Gargantua" or "Pantagruel," any more than it is a serious ideal work like "Amadis de Gaula : " the proportion of deliberately sought effects is small ; the great bulk,

serious or comic, seems to have come quite at random. It is not a caricatured reproduction of the poems of chivalry sung in the market, for they were probably serious, stately, and bald, with at most an occasional joke ; it is the reproduction of the joint impression received from the absurd, harum-scarum, unpractical world of chivalry of the poet, and the real world of prose, of good-humoured buffoonish coarseness with which the itinerant poet was surrounded. The paladins are no Don Quixotes, the princesses no Dulcineas, the battles are real battles ; but the language is that of Florentine wool-workers, housewives, cheese-sellers, and ragamuffins, crammed with the slang of the market-place, its heavy jokes and perpetual sententious aphorism. Moreover the prominence given to food and eating is unrivalled except by Rabelais : the poet must have lounged with delight through the narrow mediæval lanes, crowded with booths and barrows, sniffing with rapture the mingled scents of cheese, pork, fish, spices, and a hundred strange concomitant market smells. And the market, that classic *mercato vecchio* (alas, finally condemned and destroyed by modern sanitary prudishness, and which only those who have seen can conceive in its full barbarous, nay, barbaric Pantagruelian splendour of food, blood, and stenches) of Florence, is what we think of throughout the poem. And, when Messer Luigi comes to narrate, with real gravity and after the due invocation of the Virgin, the Trinity, and the saints,

the tremendous disaster of Roncevaux, he uses such words and such similes, that above the neighing of horses and the clash of hurtling armour and the yells of the combatants we suddenly hear the nasal sing-song of Florentine tripe-vendors and pumpkin-pod-sellers, the chaffer and oaths and laughter of the gluttonous crowd pouring through the lanes of Calimala and Pellicceria ; nay (horrible and grotesque miracle), there seems to rise out of the confused darkness of the battle-filled valley, there seems to disengage itself (as out of a mist) from the chaos of heaped bodies, and the flash of steel among the whirlwinds of dust, a vision, more and more distinct and familiar, of the crowded square with its black rough-hewn, smoke-stained houses, ornamented with Robbia-ware angels and lilies or painted madonnas ; of its black butchers' dens, outside which hang the ghastly disembowelled sheep with blood-stained fleeces, the huge red-veined hearts and livers ; of the piles of cabbage and cauliflowers, the rows of tin ware and copper saucepans, the heaps of macaroni and pastes, of spices and drugs ; the garlands of onions and red peppers and piles of apples ; the fetid sliminess of the fish tressels ; the rough pavement oozy and black, slippery with cabbage-stalks, puddled with bullock's blood, strewn with plucked feathers—all under the bright blue sky, with Giotto's dove-coloured belfry soaring high above ; a vision, finally, of one of those deep dens, with walls all covered with majolica plates and dishes and

flashing brass-embossed trenchers, in the dark depths of which crackles perennially a ruddy fire, while a huge spit revolves, offering to the flames now one now the other side of scores of legs of mutton, rounds of beef, and larded chickens, trickling with the butter unceasingly ladled by the white-dressed cooks. Roncisvalle, Charlemagne, the paladins, paganism, Christendom—what of them? “I believe in capon, roast or boiled, and sometimes done in butter; in mead and in must; and I believe in the pasty and the pastykens, mother and children; but above all things I believe in good wine”—as Margutte snuffles out in his catechism; and as to Saracens and paladins, past, present, and future, a fig for them!

But meanwhile, for all that Florentine burgesses, artizans, and humorists may think, there is in this Italy of the Renaissance something besides Florence; there is a school of poetry, disconnected with the realisms of Lorenzo and Pulci, with the Ovidian Petrarchisms of Politian. There is Ferrara. Lying, as they do, between the Northern Apennine slopes of Modena and the Euganean hills, the dominions of the House of Este appear at first sight merely as part and parcel of Lombardy, and we should expect from them nothing very different from that which we expect from Milan or Bologna or Padua. But the truth is different; all round Ferrara, indeed, stretches the fertile flatness of Lombard cornfields, and they produce, as infallibly as they produce their sacks of grain and tuns of wine

and heaps of silk cocoon, the intellectual and social equivalents of such things in Renaissance Italy : industry, wealth, comfort, scepticism, art. But on either side, into the defiles of the Euganean hills to the north, into the widening torrent valleys of the Modenese Apennines to the south, the Marquisate of Este stretches up into feudalism, into chivalry, into the imaginative kingdom of the Middle Ages. Mediævalism, feudalism, chivalry, indeed, of a very modified sort ; and as different from that of France and Germany as differ from the poverty-stricken plains and forests and arid moors of the north these Italian mountain slopes, along which the vines crawl in long trellises, and the chestnuts rise in endlessly superposed tiers of terraces, cultivated by a peasant who is not the serf, but the equal sharer in profits with the master of the soil. And on one of those fertile hill-sides, looking down upon a narrow valley all a green-blue shimmer with corn and vine-bearing elms, was born, in the year 1434, Matteo Maria Boiardo, in the village which gave him the title, one of the highest in the Estensian dominions, of Count of Scandiano. Here, in the Apennines, Scandiano is a fortified village, also a castle, doubtless half turned into a Renaissance villa, but mediæval and feudal nevertheless ; but the name of Scandiano belongs also, I know not for what reason, to a certain little red-brick palace on the outskirts of Ferrara, beautifully painted with half-allegorical, half-realistic pageant frescoes by Cosimo Tura, and en-

closing a sweet tangled orchard-garden ; to all of which, being the place to which Duke Borso and Duke Ercole were wont to retire for amusement, the Ferrarese have given the further name of Schifanoia, which means, "fly from cares." This little coincidence of Scandiano the feudal castle in the Apennines, and Scandiano the little pleasure palace at Ferrara, seems to give, by accidental allegory, a fair idea of the double nature of Matteo Boiardo, of the Ferrarese court to which he belonged, and of the school of poetry (including the more notable but less original work of Ariosto) which the genius of the man and the character of the court succeeded together in producing.

To understand Boiardo we must compare him with Ariosto ; and to understand Ariosto we must compare him with Boiardo ; both belong to the same school, and are men of very similar genius, and where the one leaves off the other begins. But first, in order to understand the character of this poetry which, in the main, is identical in Boiardo and in his more successful but less fascinating pupil Ariosto, let us understand Ferrara. It was, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a chivalric town of Ariostesque chivalry : feudalism turned courtly and elegant, and, moreover, very liberal and comfortable by preponderance of democratic and industrial habits ; a military court, of brave mercenary captains full of dash and adventure, not mere brigands and marauders, having studied strategy, like the little Umbrian chief-

tains; a court orderly, elegant, and brilliant: a prince not risen from behind a counter like Medicis and Petruccis, nor out of blood like Baglionis and Sforzas, but of a noble old house whose beginnings are lost in the mist of real chivalry and real paladinism; a duke with a pretence of feudal honour and decorum, at whose court men were all brave and ladies all chaste—with the little licenses of baseness and gallantry admitted by Renaissance chivalry. A bright, brilliant court at the close of the fifteenth century; and more stable than the only one which might have rivalled it, the Feltrian court of Urbino, too small and lost among the Umbrian bandits. A bright, brilliant town, also, this Ferrara: not mercantile like Florence, not mere barracks like Perugia; a capital, essentially, in its rich green plain by the widened Po, with its broad handsome streets (so different from the mediæval exchanges of Bologna, and the feudal alleys of Perugia), its well-built houses, so safe and modern, needing neither *bravi* nor iron window bars, protected (except against some stray murder by one of the Estensi themselves), by the duke's well-organized police; houses with well-trimmed gardens, like so many Paris hôtels; and with the grand russet brick castle, military with its moat and towers, urban with its belvederes and balconies, in the middle, well placed to sweep away with its guns (the wonderful guns of the duke's own making) any riot, tidily, cleanly, without a nasty heap of bodies and slop of blood as in the narrow streets of other towns,

Imagine this bright capital, placed, moreover, in the richest centre of Lombardy, with glitter of chivalry from the Euganean hills and Apennines (castellated with Este, Monselice, Canossa, and Boiardo's own Scandiano); with gorgeous rarities of commerce from Venice and Milan—a central, unique spot. It is the natural home of the chivalrous poets of the Renaissance, Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso; as Florence is of the Politicians and Pulcieri (Hellenism and back-shopery); and Venice of the literature of lust, jests, cynicism, and adventure, Aretine, Beolco, Calmo, and Poliphilo-Colonna. In that garden, where the white butterflies crowd among the fruit trees bowed down to the tall grass of the palace of Schifanoia—a garden neither grand nor classic, but elegiac and charming—we can imagine Boiardo or Ariosto reading their poems to just such a goodly company as Giraldi Cinthio (a Ferrarese, and fond of romance, too) describes in the prologue of his "Ecatomiti:" gentle and sprightly ladies, with the splendid brocaded robes, and the gold-filleted golden hair of Dosso Dossi's wonderful Alcina Circe; graceful youths like the princely St. John of Benvenuto Garofalo; jesters like Dosso's at Modena; brilliant captains like his St. George and St. Michael; and a little crowd of pages with doublets and sleeves laced with gold tags, of sedate magistrates in fur robes and scarlet caps, of white-dressed maids with instruments of music and embroidery frames and hand looms, like those which Cosimo Tura painted for Duke

Borso on the walls of this same Schifanoia palace. Such is the audience ; now for the poems.

The stuff of Boiardo and Ariosto is the same: that old mediæval stuff of the Carolingian poems, coloured, scented with Arthurian chivalry and wonder. The knight-errantry of the Keltic tales is cleverly blended with the pseudo-historical military organization of the Carolingian cycle. Paladins and Saracens are ingeniously manœuvred about, now scattered in little groups of twos and threes, to encounter adventures in the style of Sir Launcelot or Amadis; now gathered into a compact army to crash upon each other as at Roncevaux; or else wildly flung up by the poet to alight in fairyland, to find themselves in the caverns of Jamschid, in the isles where Oberon's mother kept Cæsar, and Morgana kept Ogier, in the boats, entering subterranean channels, of Sindbad and Huon of Bordeaux; a constant alternation of individual adventure and wholesale organized campaigns, conceived and carried out with admirable ingenuity. So much for the deeds of arms. The deeds of love are also compounded of Carolingian and Arthurian, but flavoured with special Renaissance feeling. There is a great deal of rapid love-making between too gallant knights and too impressionable ladies; licentious amours which we moderns lay at the door of Boiardo and Ariosto, not knowing that the licentiousness of the Olivers and Ogiers and Guérins and Huons of mediæval poetry, of the sentimental

Amadis, Galaors, and Lisvarts of the fourteenth century, whom the Renaissance has toned down in Rogers and Rinaldos and Ricciardettos, is by many degrees worse. A moral improvement also (for all the immorality of the Renaissance) in the eschewing of the never-failing adultery of the Arthurian romances, and the appropriation to legitimately faithful love of the poetical devotion which Tristram and Launcelot bear to other men's wives. To this are added, and more by Ariosto than by Boiardo, two essentially Italian elements : something of the nobility of passion of the Platonic sonneteers ; and a good dose of the ironical, scurrilous, moralizing immoral anecdote gossiping of Boccaccio and Sacchetti. Such is the stuff. The conception, though rarely comic, and sometimes *bonâ fide* serious, is never earnest. All this is a purely artistic world, a world of decorative arabesque incident, intended to please, scarcely ever to move, or to move, at most, like some Decameronian tale of Isabella and the Basil Plant, or Constance and Martuccio. On the other hand, there is none of the grotesque irreverence of Pulci. Boiardo and Ariosto are not in earnest ; they are well aware that their heroes and heroines are mere modern men and women tricked out in pretty chivalric trappings, driven wildly about from Paris to Cathay, and from Spain to the Orkneys—on Tony Lumpkin's principle of driving his mother round and round the garden plot till she thought herself on a heath six miles off—without ever really changing

place. But they do not, like Pulci, make fun of their characters. They write chivalry romances not for Florentine pork-butchers and wool-carders, but for gallant ladies and gentlemen, to whom, with duels, tournaments, serenades, and fine speeches, chivalry is an admired name, though no longer a respected reality.

The heroes of Boiardo and of Ariosto are always bold and gallant and glittering, the spirit of romance is in them; a giant Sancho Panza like Morgante, redolent of sausage and cheese, would never be admitted into the society of a Ferrarese Orlando. The art of Boiardo and of Ariosto is eminently pageant art, in which sentiment and heroism are but as one element among many; there is no pretence at reality (although there is a good deal of incidental realism), and no thought of the interest in subject and persons which goes with reality. It is a masquerade, and one whose men and women must, I think, be imagined in a kind of artistic fancy costume: a mixture of the Renaissance dress and of the antique, as we see it in the prints of contemporary pageants, and in Venetian and Ferrarese pictures; that Circe of Dosso's, in the Borghese gallery of Rome, seated in her stately wine-lees and gold half-heraldically and half-cabalistically patterned brocade, before the rose-bushes of the little mysterious wood, is the very ideal of the Falerinas and Alcinas, of the enchantresses of Boiardo and Ariosto. Pageant people, these of the Ferrarese poets; they only play at being in forests and deserts,

as children play at being on volcanoes or in Greenland by the nursery fire. It is a kind of dressing up, a masquerading of the fancy; not disguising in order to deceive, but rather laying hold of any pretty or brilliant impressive garb that comes to hand, and putting that on in conjunction with many odds and ends, as an artist's guests might do with the silks and velvets and Oriental properties of a studio. These knights and ladies, for ever tearing about from Scotland to India, never, in point of fact, get any further than the Apennine slopes where Boiardo was born, where Ariosto governed the Garfagnana. They ride for ever (while supposed to be in the Ardennes or in Egypt) across the velvet moss turf, all patterned with minute starry clovers and the fallen white rosy chestnut blossom, amidst the bracken beneath the slender chestnut trees, the pale blue sky looking in between their spreading branches; at most they lose their way in the intricacies of some seaside pineta, where the feet slip on the fallen needles, and the sun slants along the vistas of serried, red, scaly trunks, among the juniper and gorse and dry grass and flowers growing in the sea sand. Into the vast mediæval forests of Germany and France, Boiardo and Ariosto's fancy never penetrated.

Such is the school: a school represented in its typical character only by Boiardo and Ariosto, but to which belong, nevertheless, with whatever differences, Tasso, Spenser, Camoens, all the poets of Renaissance

romance. Now of the two leaders thereof. Here I feel that I can speak only personally ; tell only of my own personal impressions and preferences. Comparing together Boiardo and Ariosto, I am, of course, aware of the infinite advantages of the latter. Ariosto is a man of far more varied genius ; he is an artist, while Boiardo is an amateur ; he is learned in arranging and ornamenting ; he knows how to alternate various styles, how to begin and how to end. Moreover, he is a scholarly person of a more scholarly time : he is familiar with the classics, and, what is more important, he is familiar with the language in which he is writing. He writes exquisitely harmonious, supple, and brilliant Tuscan verse, with an infinite richness of diction ; while poor Boiardo jogs along in a language which is not the Lombard dialect in which he speaks, and which is very uncouth and awkward, as is every pure language for a provincial ; indeed, so much so, that the pedantic Tuscans require Berni to make Tuscan, elegant, to *ingentilire*, with infinite loss to quaintness and charm, the "Orlando Innamorato" of poor Ferrarese Boiardo. Moreover, Ariosto has many qualities unknown to Boiardo ; wit, malice, stateliness, decided eloquence and power of simile and apostrophe ; he is a symphony for full orchestra, and Boiardo a mere melody played on a single fiddle, which good authorities (and no one dare contest with Italians when they condemn anything not Tuscan as jargon) pronounce to be no Cremona. All these advantages Ariosto certainly

has ; and I do not quarrel with those who prefer him for them. But many of them distinctly take away from my pleasure. I confess that I am bored by the beautifully written moral and allegorical preludes of Ariosto's cantos ; I would willingly give all his aphorism and all his mythology to get quickly to the story. Also, I resent his admirable rhetorical flourishes about his patrons, his Ercoles, Ippolitos, and Isabellas—they ring false, dreadfully false and studied ; and Boiardo's quickly despatched friendly greeting of his friends, his courteous knights and gentle ladies, pleases me much better. Moreover, the all-pervading consciousness of the existence of Homer, Virgil, nay, Statius and Lucan, every trumpery antique epic-monger, annoys me, giving an uncomfortable doubt as to whether Ariosto did not try to make all this nonsense serious, and this romance into an epic ; all this occasional Virgilian stateliness, alternated with a kind of polished Decameronian gossipy cynicism, diverts my attention, turns paladins and princesses too much into tutor-educated gentlemen, into Bandello and Cinthio-reading ladies of the sixteenth century. The picture painted by Ariosto is finer, but you see too much of the painter ; he and his patrons take up nearly the whole foreground, and they have affected, idealized faces and would-be dignified poses. For these and many other reasons, I personally prefer Boiardo ; and perhaps the best reason for my preference is the irrational one that he gives me more

pleasure. My preferences, my impressions, I have said, are in this matter, much less critical than personal. Hence I can speak of Boiardo only as he affects me.

When first I read Boiardo, I was conscious of a curious phenomenon in myself. I must confess to reading books usually in a very ardent or rather weary manner, either way in a hurry to finish them. As it happened, when I borrowed Boiardo, I had a great many other things on hand which required my time and attention; yet I could not make up my mind to return the book until I had finished it, though my intention had been merely to satisfy my curiosity by a dip into it. I went on, without that eager desire to know what follows which one has in a novel; drowsily with absolute reluctance to leave off, like the reluctance to rise from the grass beneath the trees with only butterflies and shadows to watch, or the reluctance to put aside some fairy book of Walter Crane's. It was like strolling in some quaint, ill-trimmed, old garden, finding fresh flowers, fresh bits of lichen on walls, fresh fragments of broken earthenware ornaments; or, rather, more like a morning in the Cathedral Library at Siena, the place where the gorgeous choir books are kept, itself illuminated like missal pages by Pinturicchio: amused, delighted, not moved nor fascinated; finding every moment something new, some charming piece of gilding, some sweet plumed head, some quaint little tree or town; making a journey of lazy discovery

in a sort of world of Prince Charmings, the real realm of the "Faëry Queen," quite different in enchantment from the country of Spenser's Gloriana, with its pale allegoric ladies and knights, half-human, half-metaphysical, and its make-believe allegorical ogres and giants. This is the real Fairyland, this of Boiardo: no mere outskirts of Ferrara, with real, playfully cynical Ferrarese men and women tricked out as paladins and Amazons, and making fun of their disguise, as in Ariosto; no wonderland of Tasso, with enchanted gardens copied out of Bolognese pictures and miraculous forests learned from theatre mechanicians, wonders imitated by a great poet from the cardboard and firework wonders of Bianca Cappello's wedding feasts. This is the real fairyland, the wonderland of mediæval romance and of Persian and Arabian tales, no longer solemn or awful, but brilliant, sunny, only half believed in; the fairyland of the Renaissance, superficially artistic, with its lightest, brightest fancies, and its charming realities; its cloistered and painted courts with plashing fountains, its tapestried and inlaid rooms, its towered and belvedered villas, its quaint clipped gardens full of strange Oriental plants and beasts; and all this transported into a country of wonders, where are the gardens of the Hesperides, the fountain of Merlin, the tomb of Narcissus, the castle of Morgan-le-Fay; every quaint and beautiful fancy, antique and mediæval, mixed up together, as in some Renaissance picture of Botticelli or Rosselli or Filip-

pino, where knights in armour descend from Pegasus before Roman temples, where swarthy white-turbaned Turks, with oddly bunched-up trousers and jewelled caftans, and half-naked, oak-crowned youths, like genii descended, pensive and wondering, from some antique sarcophagus, and dapper princelets and stalwart knights, and citizens and monks, all crowd round the altar of some wonder-working Macone or Apolline or Trevigante ; some comic, dreadful, apish figure, mummied up in half-antique, half-oriental garb. Or else we are led into some dainty, pale-tinted panel of Botticelli, where the maidens dance in white clinging clothes, strewing flowers on to the flower-freaked turf ; or into some of Poliphilo's vignettes, where the gentle ladies, seated with lute and viol under vine-trellises, welcome the young gallant, or poet, or knight.

Such is the world of Boiardo. Spenser has once or twice peeped in, painted it, and given us exquisite little pictures, as that of Malecasta's castle, all hung with mythological tapestries, that of the enchanted chamber of Britomart, and those of Sir Calidore meeting the Graces and of Hellenore dancing with the Satyrs ; but Spenser has done it rarely, trembling to return to his dreary allegories. Equal to these single pictures by Spenser, Boiardo has only one or two, but he keeps us permanently in the world where such pictures are painted. Boiardo is not a great artist like Spenser ; but he is a wizard, which is better. He leads us, unceasingly, through the little dreamy laurel-

woods, where we meet crisp-haired damsels tied to pine-trees, or terrible dragons, or enchanted wells, through whose translucent green waters we see brocaded rooms full of fair ladies ; he ferries us ever and anon across shallow streams, to the castles where *gentil donzelle* wave their kerchiefs from the pillared belvedere ; he slips us unseen into the camps and council-rooms of the splendidly trapped Saracens, like so many figures out of Filippino's frescoes ; he conducts us across the bridges where giants stand warders, to the mysterious carved tombs whence issue green and crested snakes, who, kissed by a paladin, turn into lovely enchantresses ; he takes us beneath the beds of rivers and through the bowels of the earth where kings and knights turned into statues of gold, sit round tables covered with jewels, illumined by carbuncles more wonderful than that of Jamschid ; or through the mazes of fairy gardens, where every ear of corn, cut off, turns into a wild beast, and every fallen leaf into a bird, where hydras watch in the waters and lamias rear themselves in the grass, where Orlando must fill his helmet with roses lest he hear the voice of the sirens ; where all the wonders of Antiquity—the snake-women, the Circes, the sirens, the hydras and fauns live, strangely changed into something infinitely quaint and graceful, still half-antique, yet already half-Arabian or Keltic, in the midst of the fairyland of Merlin and of Oberon—live, move, transform themselves afresh ; where the golden-haired damsels and

the stripling knights, delicate like Pinturicchio's Prince Charmings, gallop for ever on their enchanted coursers, within enchanted armour, invincible, invulnerable, under a sky always blue, and through an unceasing spring, ever onwards to new adventures. Adventures which the noble, gentle Castellan of Scandiano, poet and knight and humorist, philanthropical philosopher almost from sheer goodness of heart, yet a little crazy, and capable of setting all the church bells ringing in honour of the invention of the name of Rodomonte—relates not to some dully ungrateful Alfonso or Ippolito, but to his own guests, his own brilliant knights and ladies, with ever and anon an effort to make them feel, through his verse, some of those joyous spring-tide feelings which bubble up in himself; as when he remembers how, "Once did I wander on a May morning in a fair flower-adorned field on a hillside overlooking the sea, which was all tremulous with light; and there, among the roses of a green thorn-brake, a damsel was singing of love; singing so sweetly that the sweetness still touches my heart; touches my heart, and makes me think of the great delight it was to listen;" and how he would fain repeat that song, and indeed an echo of its sweetness runs through his verse. Meanwhile, stanza pours out after stanza, adventure grows out of adventure, each more wonderful, more gorgeous than its predecessor. To which listen the ladies, with their white, girdled dresses and crimped golden locks; the youths, with their soft

beardless faces framed in combed-out hair, with their daggers on their hips and their plumed hats between their fingers ; and the serious bearded men, in silken robes ; drawing nearer the poet, letting go lute or violin or music-book as they listen on the villa terrace or in some darkened room, where the sunset sky turns green-blue behind the pillared window, and the roses hang over the trellise of the cloister. And as they did four hundred years ago, so do we now, rejoice. The great stalwart naked forms of Greece no longer leap and wrestle or carry their well-poised baskets of washed linen before us ; the mailed and vizored knights of the Nibelungen no longer clash their armour to the sound of Volker's red fiddle-bow ; the glorified souls of Dante no longer move in mystic mazes of light before the eyes of our fancy. All that is gone. But here is the fairyland of the Renaissance. And thus Matteo Boiardo, Count of Scandiano, goes on, adding adventure to adventure, stanza to stanza, in his castle villa, or his palace at Ferrara. But suddenly he stops and his bright fiddle and lute music jars and ends : " While I am singing, O Redeeming God, I see all Italy set on fire by these Gauls, coming to ravage I know not what fresh place."

And thus, with the earlier and more hopeful Renaissance of the fifteenth century, Matteo Boiardo broke off with his "Orlando Innamorato." The perfect light-heartedness, the delight in play of a gentle, serious, eminently kindly nature, which gives half the

charm to Boiardo's work, seems to have become impossible after the ruin of Italian liberty and prosperity, the frightful showing up of Italy's moral and social and political insignificance at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Lombardy especially became a permanent battle-field, and its towns mere garrison places of French, German, Spanish, and Swiss barbarians, whose presence meant slaughter and pillage and every foulest outrage; and then, between the horrors of the unresisted invasions and the unresisted exactions, came plague and famine, and industry and commerce gradually died out. A few princes, subsidised and guarded by French or Imperialists, kept up an appearance of cheerfulness, but the courts even grew more gloomy as the people grew more miserable. There is more joking, more resonant laughter in Ariosto than in Boiardo, but there is very much less serenity and cheerfulness; ever and anon a sort of bitterness, a dreary moralizing tendency, a still more dreary fit of prophesying future good in which he has no belief, comes over Ariosto. Berni, who rewrote the "Orlando Innamorato" in choice Tuscan, and who underlined every faintly marked jest of Boiardo's, with evident preoccupation of the ludicrous effects of the "Morgante Maggiore"—Berni even could not keep up his spirits; into the middle of Boiardo's serene fairy-land adventures he inserted a description of the sack of Rome which is simply harrowing. All real cheerfulness departed from the people, to be replaced only

by pleasure in the debaucheries of the buffoonish obscenity of Aretino, Bandello, and so forth, to which the men of the dying Italy of the Renaissance listened as the roysterers of the plague of Florence, with the mortal sickness almost upon them, may have listened to the filthy songs which they trolled out in their drunkenness. Or at best, the poor starved, bruised, battered, humiliated nation may have tried to be cheerful on the principle of its harlequin playwright Beolco, who, more honest than the Ariostos and Bibbienas, and Aretines, came forward on his stage of planks at Padua, and after describing the ruin and wretchedness of the country, the sense of dreariness and desolation, which made young folk careless of marriage, and the very nightingales (he thought) careless of song, recommended his audience, since they could not even cry thoroughly and to feel any the better for it, to laugh, if they still were able. Boiardo was forgotten ; his spirit was unsuited to the depression, gloomy brutality, gloomy sentimentality, which grew every day as Italy settled down after its Renaissance-Shrovetide in the cinders and fasting of the long Lent of Spanish and Jesuit rule.

Still the style of Boiardo was not yet exhausted ; the peculiar kind of fairy epic, the peculiar combination of chivalric and classic elements of which the "Orlando Innamorato" and the "Orlando Furioso," had been the great examples, still fascinated poets and public. The Renaissance, or what remained of it, was now no

longer confined to Italy ; it had spread, paler, more diluted, shallower, over the rest of Europe. To follow the filiation of schools, to understand the intellectual relationships of individuals, of the latter half of the sixteenth century, it becomes necessary to move from one country to another. And thus the two brother poets of the family of Boiardo, its two last and much saddened representatives, came to write in very different languages and under very different circumstances. These two are Tasso and our own Spenser. They are both poets of the school of the "Orlando Innamorato," both poets of a reaction, of a kind of purified Renaissance: the one of the late Italian Renaissance emasculated by the Council of Trent and by Spain ; the other of the English Renaissance, in its youth truly, but, in the individual case of Spenser, timidly drawn aside from the excesses of buoyant life around. In the days of the semi-atheist dramatists, all flesh and blood and democracy, Spenser steps himself in Christianity and chivalry, even as Tasso does, following on the fleshly levity and scepticism of Boiardo, Berni, and Ariosto. There is in both poets a paleness, a certain diaphanous weakness, an absence of strong tint or fibre or perfume ; in Tasso the pallor of autumn, in Spenser the paleness of spring : autumn left sad and leafless by the too voluptuous heat and fruitfulness of summer ; spring still pale and pinched by winter, with timid nipped grass and unripe stiff buds and catkins, which never suggest the tangle of

bush, grasses, and magnificent flowers and fruits, sweet, splendid, or poisonous, which the sun will make out of them. The Renaissance, in the past for Tasso, in the proximate and very visible future for Spenser, has frightened both ; the cynicism and bestiality of men like Machiavelli and Aretino ; the godless, muscular lustiness of Marlowe, Greene, and Peele, seen in a glimpse by Tasso and Spenser, have given a shock to their sensitive nature, have made them turn away and hide themselves from a second sight of it. They both take refuge in a land of fiction, of romance, from the realities into which they dread to splash ; a world unsubstantial, diaphanous, faint-hued, almost passionless, which they make out of beauty and heroism and purity, which they alembicize and refine, but into which there never enters any vital element, anything to give it flesh and bone and pulsing life : it is a mere soap bubble. And beautiful as is this world of their own making, it is too negative even for them ; they move in it only in imagination, calm, serene, vacant, almost sad. There is in it, and in themselves, a something wanting ; and the remembrance of that unholy life of reality which jostled and splashed their delicate souls, comes back and haunts them with its evil thought. There is no laugh—what is worse, no smile—in these men. Incipient puritanism, not yet the terrible brawny reality of Bunyan, but a vague, grey spectre, haunts Spenser ; and the puritanism of Don Quixote, the vague, melancholy, fantastic reverting

from the evil world of to-day to an impossible world of chivalry, is troubling the sight of Tasso. He cannot go crazy like Don Quixote, and instead he grows melancholy; he cannot believe in his own ideals; he cannot give them life, any more than can Spenser give life to his allegoric knights and ladies, because the life would have to be fetched by Tasso out of the flesh of Ariosto, and by Spenser out of the blood of Marlowe; and both Tasso and Spenser shrink at the thought of what might with it be inoculated or transfused; and they rest satisfied with phantoms. The phantoms of Spenser are more shadowy, much more utterly devoid of human character; they are almost metaphysical abstractions, and they do not therefore sadden us: they are too unlike living things to seem very lifeless. But the phantoms of Tasso, he would fain make realities; he works at every detail of character, history, or geography, which may make his people real; they are not, as with Spenser, elves and wizards flitting about in a nameless fairyland, characterless and passionless; they are historical creatures, captains and soldiers in a country mapped out by the geographer; but they are phantoms all the more melancholy, these beautiful and heroic Clorindas and Erminias and Tancreds and Godfreys—why? because the real world around Tasso is peopled with Brachianos and Corombonas, and Annabellas and Giovannis, creatures for Webster and Ford; and because this world of chivalry is, in

his Italy, as false as the world of Amadis and Esplandian in Toboso and Barcelona for poor Don Quixote. Melancholy therefore, and dreamy, both Tasso and Spenser, with nothing they can fully love in reality, because they see it tainted with reality and evil ; without the cheerful falling back upon everyday life of Ariosto and Shakespeare ; and with a strange fancy for fairyland, for the distant, for the Happy Islands, the St. Brandan's Isles, the country of the fountain of youth, the country of which vague reports have come back with the ships of Raleigh and Ponce de Leon. Tasso and Spenser are happiest, in their calm, melancholy way, when they can let themselves go in day-dreams, and talk of things in which they do not believe, of diamond shields which stun monsters, of ointments which cure all ills of body and of soul, of enchanted groves whose trees sound with voices and lutes, of boats in which, steered by fairies, we can glide across the scarcely rippled summer sea, and, watching the ruins of the past, time and reality left behind, set sail for some strange land of bliss. And there is in the very sensuousness and love of beauty of these men a vagueness and melancholy, a constant sense of the fleeting and of the eternal, as in that passage, translated from the languidly sweet Italian perfection of Tasso into the timid, almost scentless, English of Spenser—"Cosi trapassa al trapassar d'un giorno."

So passeth, in the passing of a day,  
Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre

Ne more doth flourish, after first decay,  
That earst was sought to deck both bed and bowre  
Of many a lady, and many a Paramowre.  
Gather therefore the Rose whilest yet is prime,  
For soone comes age that will her pride deflowre ;  
Gather the Rose of love whilest yet is time,  
Whilest loving thou mayest loved be withe equall crime.

A sense of evanescence, of dreamlikeness, quite different from the thoughtless enjoyment of Boiardo, from the bold and manly facing of the future, the solemn, strong sense of life and death as of waking realities, of the Elizabethan dramatists, even of weaklings like Massinger and Beaumont. In Tasso and in Spenser there is no such joyousness, no such solemnity; only a dreamy watching, a regret which is scarcely a regret, at the evanescence of pale beauty and pale life, of joys feebly felt and evils meekly borne.

With Tasso and Spenser comes to a close the school of Boiardo, the small number of real artists who finally gave an enduring and beautiful shape to that strangely mixed and altered material of romantic epic left behind by the Middle Ages; comes to an end at least till our own day of appreciative and deliberate imitation and selection and rearrangement of the artistic forms of the past. Until the revival (after much study and criticism) by our own poets of Arthur and Gudrun and the Fortunate Isles, the world had had enough of mediæval romance. Chivalry had avowedly ended in chamberlainry; the devotion to women in the official routine of the *cicisbeo*; the last romance to which the

late Renaissance had clung, which made it sympathize with Huon, Ogier, Orlando, and Rinaldo, which had made it take delight still in the fairyland of Oberon, of Fallerina, of Alcina, of Armida, of Acrasia, the romance of the new world, had also turned into prose, prose of blood-stained filth. The humanistic and rationalistic men of the Renaissance had doubtless early begun to turn up their noses in dainty dilettantism or scientific contempt, at what were later to be called by Montaigne, "Ces Lancelots du Lac, ces Amadis, ces Huons et tels fatras di livres à quoy l'enfance s'amuse ;" and by Ben Jonson :

Public nothings,  
Abortives of the fabulous dark cloister,  
Sent out to poison courts, and infect manners—

the public at large was more constant, and still retained a love for mediæval romance. But more than humanities, more than scientific scepticism and religious puritanism, did the slow dispelling of the illusion of Eldorado and the Fortunate Isles. Mankind set sail for America in brilliant and knightly gear, believing in fountains of youth and St. Brandan's Isles, with Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser still in its pockets. It returns from America either as the tattered fever-stricken ruffian, or as the vulgar, fat upstart of Spanish comedy, returns without honour or shame, holding money (and next to money, negroes) of greater account than any insignia of paladinship or the Round Table ; it is brutal, vulgar, cynical ; at best very sad, and it

gets written for its delectation the comic-tragic novels of rascallions, panders, prostitutes, and card-sharpers, which, from "Lazarillo de Tormes" to "Gil Blas," and from "Gil Blas" to "Tom Jones," finally replace the romances of the Launcelots, Galahads, Rinaldos, and Orlandos.

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Thus did the mediæval romantic-epic stuffs suffer alteration, adulteration, and loss of character, throughout the long period of the Middle Ages, without ever receiving an artistic shape, such as should make all men preserve and cherish them for the only thing which makes men preserve and cherish such things—that never to be wasted quality, beauty. The Middle Ages were powerless to endow therewith their own subjects; so the subjects had to wait, altering more and more with every passing day, till the coming of the Renaissance. And by that time these subjects had ceased to have any serious meaning whatever; the Roland of the song of Roncevaux had become the crazy Orlando of Ariosto; the Renaud of the "Quatre Fils Aymon," had become the Rinaldo, thrashed with sheaves of lilies by Cupid, of Matteo Boiardo. The Renaissance took up the old epic-romantic materials and made out of them works of art; but works of art which, as I said before, were playthings.



MEDIÆVAL LOVE.



## MEDIÆVAL LOVE.

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ON laying down the "Vita Nuova" our soul is at first filled and resounding with the love of Beatrice. Whatever habits or capacities of noble loving may lurk within ourselves, have been awakened by the solemn music of this book, and have sung in unison with Dante's love till we have ceased to hear the voice of his passion and have heard only the voice of our own. When the excitement has diminished, when we have grown able to separate from our own feelings the feelings of the man dead these five centuries and a half, and to realize the strangeness, the obsolescence of this love which for a moment had seemed our love; then a new phase of impressions has set in, and the "Vita Nuova" inspires us with mere passionate awe: awe before this passion which we feel to be no longer our own, but far above and distant from us, as in some rarer stratum of atmosphere; awe before this woman who creates it, or rather who is its creation. Even as

Dante fancied that the people of Florence did when the bodily presence of this lady came across their path, so do we cast down our glance as the image of Beatrice passes across our mind. Nay, the glory of her, felt so really while reading the few, meagre words in the book, is stored away in our heart, and clothes with a faint aureole the lady—if ever in our life we chance to meet her—in whom, though Dante tells us nothing of stature, features, eyes or hair, we seem to recognize a likeness to her on whose passage “ogni lingua divien tremando muta, e gli occhi non ardiscon di guardare.” Passion like this, to paraphrase a line of Rossetti’s, is genius; and it arouses in such as look upon it the peculiar sense of wonder and love, of awe-stricken raising up of him who contemplates, which accompanies the contemplation of genius.

But it may be that one day we feel, instead of this, wonder indeed, but wonder mingled with doubt. This ideal love, which craves for no union with its object; which seeks merely to see, nay, which is satisfied with mere thinking on the beloved one, will strike us with the cold and barren glitter of the miraculous. This Beatrice, as we gaze on her, will prove to be no reality of flesh and blood like ourselves; she is a form modelled in the semblance of that real, living woman who died six centuries ago, but the substance of which is the white fire of Dante’s love. And the thought will arise that this purely intellectual love of a scarce-noticed youth for a scarce-known woman is a thing

which does not belong to life, neither sweetening nor ennobling any of its real relations ; that it is, in its dazzling purity and whiteness, in fact a mere strange and sterile death light, such as could not and should not, in this world of ours, exist twice over. And, lest we should ever be tempted to think of this ideal love for Beatrice as of a wonderful and beautiful, but scarcely natural or useful phenomenon, I would wish to study the story of its origin and its influence. I would wish to show that had it not burned thus strangely concentrated and pure, the poets of succeeding ages could not have taken from that white flame of love which Dante set alight upon the grave of Beatrice, the spark of ideal passion which has, in the noblest of our literature, made the desire of man for woman and of woman for man burn clear towards heaven, leaving behind the noisome ashes and soul-energating vapours of earthly lust.

## I.

The centuries have made us ; forcing us into new practices, teaching us new habits, creating for us new capacities and wants ; adding, ever and anon, to the soul organism of mankind features which at first were but accidental peculiarities, which became little by little qualities deliberately sought for and at length inborn and hereditary characteristics. And thus, in what we call the Middle Ages, there was invented by the stress of circumstances, elaborated by half-con-

scious effort and bequeathed as an unalienable habit, a new manner of loving.

The women of classical Antiquity appear to us in poetry and imaginative literature as one of two things : the wife or the mistress. The wife, Penelope, Andromache, Alkestis, nay, even the charming young bride in Xenophon's "Œconomics," is, while excluded from many concerns, distinctly revered and loved in her own household capacity ; but the reverence is of the sort which the man feels for his parents and his household gods, and the affection is calm and gently rebuking like that for his children. The mistress, on the other hand, is the object of passion which is often very vehement, but which is always either simply fleshly or merely fancifully æsthetic or both, and which entirely precludes any save a degrading influence upon the sensual and suspicious lover. Even Tibullus, in love matters one of the most modern among the ancients, and capable of painting many charming and delicate little domestic idyls even in connection with a mere bought mistress, is perpetually accusing his Delia of selling herself to a higher bidder, and sighing at the high probability of her abandoning him for the Illyrian prætor or some other rich amateur of pretty women. The barbarous North—whose songs have come down to us either, like the Volsunga Saga translated by Mr. Morris, in an original pagan version, or else, as the Nibelungenlied, recast during the early Middle Ages—the North tells us nothing of the

venal paramour, but knows nothing also beyond the wedded wife; more independent and mighty perhaps than her counterpart of classical Antiquity, but although often bought, like Brynhilt or Gudrun, at the expense of tremendous adventures, cherished scarcely more passionately than the wives of Odysseus and Hector. Thus, before the Middle Ages, there existed as a rule only a holy, but indifferent and utterly unlyrical, love for the women, the equals of their husbands, wooed usually of the family and solemnly given in marriage without much consultation of their wishes; and a highly passionate and singing, but completely profligate and debasing, desire for mercenary though cultivated creatures like the Delias and Cynthias of Tibullus and Propertius, or highborn women, descended, like Catullus' Lesbia, in brazen dishonour to their level, women towards whom there could not possibly exist on the part of their lovers any sense of equality, much less of inferiority. To these two kinds of love, chaste but cold, and passionate but unchaste, the Middle Ages added, or rather opposed, a new manner of loving, which, although a mere passing phenomenon, has left the clearest traces throughout our whole mode of feeling and writing.

To describe mediæval love is a difficult matter, and to describe it except in negations is next to impossibility. I conceive it to consist in a certain sentimental, romantic, idealistic attitude towards women, not by any means incompatible however with the grossest

animalism; an attitude presupposing a complete moral, æsthetical, and social superiority on the part of the whole sex, inspiring the very highest respect and admiration independently of the individual's qualities; and reaching the point of actual worship, varying from the adoration of a queen by a courtier to the adoration of a shrine by a pilgrim, in the case of the one particular lady who happens to be the beloved; an attitude in the relations of the sexes which results in love becoming an indispensable part of a noble life, and the devoted attachment to one individual woman a necessary requisite of a gentlemanly training.

Mediæval love is not merely a passion, a desire, an affection, a habit; it is a perfect occupation. It absorbs, or is supposed to absorb, the individual; it permeates his life like a religion. It is not one of the interests of life, or, rather, one of life's phases; it is the whole of life, all other interests and actions either sinking into an unsingable region below it, or merely embroidering a variegated pattern upon its golden background. Mediæval love, therefore, never obtains its object, however much it may obtain the woman; for the object of mediæval love, as of mediæval religious mysticism, is not one particular act or series of acts, but is its own exercise, of which the various incidents of the drama between man and woman are merely so many results. It has not its definite stages, like the love of the men of classical Antiquity or the heroic time of the North: its stages of seeking, obtain-

ing, cherishing, guarding ; it is always at the same point, always in the same condition of half-religious, half-courtier-like adoration, whether it be triumphantly successful or sighingly despairing. The man and the woman—or rather, I should say, the knight and the lady, for mediæval love is an aristocratic privilege, and the love of lower folk is not a theme for song—the knight and the lady, therefore, seem always, however knit together by habit, nay, by inextricable meshes of guilt, somehow at the same distance from one another. Once they have seen and loved each other, their passion burns on always evenly, burns on (at least theoretically) to all eternity. It seems almost as if the woman were a mere shrine, a mysterious receptacle of the ineffable, a grail cup, a consecrated wafer, but not the ineffable itself. For there is always in mediæval love, however fleshly the incidents which it produces, a certain Platonic element ; that is to say, a craving for, a pursuit of, something which is an abstraction ; an abstraction impossible to define in its constant shifting and shimmering, and which seems at one moment a social standard, a religious ideal, or both, and which merges for ever in the dazzling, vague sheen of the Eternal Feminine. Hence, one of the most distinctive features of mediæval love, an extraordinary sameness of intonation, making it difficult to distinguish between the *bonâ fide* passion for which a man risks life and honour, and the mere conventional gallantry of the knight

who sticks a lady's glove on his helmet as a compliment to her rank ; nay, between the impure adoration of an adulterous lamia like Yseult, and the mystical adoration of a glorified Mother of God ; for both are women, both are ladies, and therefore the greatest poet of the early Middle Ages, Gottfried von Strassburg, sings them both with the same religious respect, and the same hysterical rapture. This mediæval love is furthermore a deliberately expected, sought-for, and received necessity in a man's life ; it is not an accident, much less an incidental occurrence to be lightly taken or possibly avoided : it is absolutely indispensable to man's social training, to his moral and æsthetical self-improvement ; it is part and parcel of manhood and knighthood. Hence, where it does not arise of itself (and where a man is full of the notion of such love, it is rare that it does not come but too soon) it has to be sought for. Ulrich von Liechtenstein, in his curious autobiography written late in the twelfth century, relates how ever since his childhood he had been aware of the necessity of the loyal love service of a lady for the accomplishment of knightly duties ; and how, as soon as he was old enough to love, he looked around him for a lady whom he might serve ; a proceeding renewed in more prosaic days and with a curious pedantic smack, by Lorenzo dei Medici ; and then again, perhaps for the last time, by the Knight of La Mancha, in that memorable discussion which ended in the enthronement as his heart's

queen of the unrivalled Dulcinea of Toboso. *Frowendienst*, "lady's service," is the name given by Ulrich von Liechtenstein, a mediæval Quixote, outshining by far the mad Provençals Rudel and Vidal, to the memoirs very delightfully done into modern German by Ludwig Tieck ; and "lady's service" is the highest occupation of knightly leisure, the subject of the immense bulk of mediæval poetry. "Lady's service" in deeds of arms and song, in constant praise and defence of the beloved, in heroic enterprise and madcap mummery, in submission and terror to the wondrous creature whom the humble servant, the lover, never calls by her sacred name, speaking of her in words unknown to Antiquity, *dompna*, *dame*, *frowe*, *madonna*—words of which the original sense has almost been forgotten, although there cleave to them even now ideas higher than those associated with the *puella* of the ancients, the *wib* of the heroic days—lady, mistress—the titles of the Mother of God, who is, after all, only the mystical Soul's Paramour of the mediæval world. "Lady's service"—the almost technical word, expressing the position, half-serf-like, half-religious, the bonds of complete humility and never-ending faithfulness, the hopes of reward, the patience under displeasure, the pride in the livery of servitude, the utter absorption of the life of one individual in the life of another ; which constitute in Provence, in France, in Germany, in England, in Italy, in the fabulous kingdoms of Arthur and Charlemagne, the strange new thing which I have named Mediæval Love.

Has such a thing really existed? Are not these mediæval poets leagued together in a huge conspiracy to deceive us? Is it possible that strong men have wept and fainted at a mere woman's name, like the Count of Nevers in "Flamenca," or that their mind has swooned away in months of reverie like that of Parzifal in Eschenbach's poem; that worldly wise and witty men have shipped off and died on sea for love of an unseen woman like Jaufre Rudel; or dressed in wolf's hide and lurked and fled before the huntsmen like Peire Vidal; or mangled their face and cut off their finger, and, clothing themselves in rags more frightful than Nessus' robe, mixed in the untouchable band of lepers like Ulrich von Liechtenstein? Is it possible to believe that the insane enterprises of the Amadis, Lisvarts and Felixmartes of late mediæval romance, that the behaviour of Don Quixote in the Sierra Morena, ever had any serious models in reality? Nay, more difficult still to believe—because the whole madness of individuals is more credible than the half-madness of the whole world—is it possible to believe that, as the poems of innumerable trouvères and troubadours, minnesingers and Italian poets, as the legion of mediæval romances of the cycles of Charlemagne, Arthur, and Amadis would have it, that during so long a period of time society could have been enthralled by this hysterical, visionary, artificial, incredible religion of mediæval love? It is at once too grotesque and too beautiful, too high and too low, to

be credible ; and our first impulse, on closing the catechisms and breviaries, the legendaries and hymn-books of this strange new creed, is to protest that the love poems must be allegories, the love romances solar myths, the Courts of Love historical bungles ; that all this mediæval world of love is a figment, a misinterpretation, a falsehood.

But if we seek more than a mere casual impression ; if, instead of feeling sceptical over one or two fragments of evidence, we attempt to collect the largest possible number of facts together ; if we read not one mediæval love story, but twenty—not half a dozen mediæval love poems, but several scores ; if we really investigate into the origin of the apparent myth, the case speedily alters. Little by little this which had been inconceivable becomes not merely intelligible, but inevitable ; the myth becomes an historical phenomenon of the most obvious and necessary sort. Mediæval love, which had seemed to us a poetic fiction, is turned into a reality ; and a reality, alas, which is prosaic. Let us look at it.

Mediæval love is first revealed in the sudden and almost simultaneous burst of song which, like the twitter and trill so dear to *trouvères*, *troubadours*, and *minnesingers*, fills the woods that yesterday were silent and dead, and greeted the earliest sunshine, the earliest faint green after the long winter numbness of the dark ages, after the boisterous gales of the earliest Crusade. The French and Provençals sang

first, the Germans later, the Sicilians last; but although we may say after deliberate analysis, such or such a form, or such or such a story, was known in this country before it appeared in that one, all imitation or suggestion was so rapid that with regard to the French, the Provençals, and the Germans at least, the impression is simultaneous; only the Sicilians beginning distinctly later, forerunners of the new love lyric, wholly different from that of trouvères, troubadours, and minnesingers, of the Italians of the latter thirteenth century. And this simultaneous revelation of mediæval love takes place in the last quarter of the twelfth century, when Northern France had already consolidated into a powerful monarchy, and Paris, after the teachings of Abélard, was recognized as the intellectual metropolis of Europe; when south of the Loire the brilliant Angevine kings held the overlordship of the cultured Raymonds of Toulouse and of the reviving Latin municipalities of Provence; when Germany was welded as a compact feudal mass by the most powerful of the Stauffens; and the papacy had been built up by Gregory and Alexander into a political wall against which Frederick and Henry vainly battered; when the Italian commonwealths grew slowly but surely, as yet still far from guessing that the day would come when their democracy should produce a new civilization to supersede this triumphant mediæval civilization of the early Capetiens, the Angevines, and the Hohenstauffens. Europe was

setting forth once more for the East ; but no longer as the ignorant and enthusiastic hordes of Peter the Hermit : Asia was the great field for adventure, the great teacher of new luxuries, at once the Eldorado and the grand tour of all the brilliant and inquisitive and unscrupulous chivalry of the day. And, while into the West were insidiously entering habits and modes of thought of the East ; throughout Germany and Provence, and throughout the still obscure free burghs of Italy, was spreading the first indication of that emotional mysticism which, twenty or thirty years later, was to burst out in the frenzy of spiritual love of St. Francis and his followers. The moment is one of the most remarkable in all history : the premature promise in the twelfth century of that intellectual revival which was delayed throughout Northern Europe until the sixteenth. It is the moment when society settled down, after the anarchy of eight hundred years, on its feudal basis ; a basis fallaciously solid, and in whose presence no one might guess that the true and definitive Renaissance would arise out of the democratic civilization of Italy.

Such is the moment when we first hear the almost universal song of mediæval love. This song comes from the triumphantly reorganized portion of society, not from the part which is slowly working its way to reorganization ; not from the timidly encroaching burghers, but from the nobles. The reign of town poetry, of *fabliaux* and *meistersang*, comes later ; the

poets of the early Middle Ages, *trouvères*, *troubadours*, and *minnesingers* are, with barely one or two exceptions, all knights. And their song comes from the castle. Now, in order to understand mediæval love, we must reflect for a moment upon this feudal castle, and upon the kind of life which the love poets of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century—whether lords like Bertram de Born, and Guillaume de Poitiers, among the *troubadours*; the Vidame de Chartres, Meurisses de Craon, and the Duke of Brabant among the *trouvères* of Northern France; like Ulrich von Liechtenstein among the *minnesingers*; or retainers and hangers-on like Bernard de Ventadour and Armand de Mareulh, like Chrestiens de Troyes, Gaissez Brulez, or Quienes de Béthune, like Walther, Wolfram, and Tannhäuser—great or small, good or bad, saw before them and mixed with in that castle. The castle of a great feudatory of the early Middle Ages, whether north or south of the Loire, in Austria or in Franconia, is like a miniature copy of some garrison town in barbarous countries. There is an enormous numerical preponderance of men over women; for only the chiefs in command, the overlord, and perhaps one or two of his principal kinsmen or adjutants, are permitted the luxury of a wife; the rest of the gentlemen are subalterns, younger sons without means, youths sent to learn their military duty and the ways of the world: a whole pack of men without wives, without homes, and usually without fortune. High

above all this deferential male crowd, moves the lady of the castle: highborn, proud, having brought her husband a dower of fiefs often equal to his own, and of vassals devoted to her race. About her she has no equals; her daughters, scarcely out of the nurse's hands, are given away in marriage; and her companions, if companions they may be called, are the waiting ladies, poor gentlewomen situated between the maid of honour and the ladies' maid, like that Brangwaine whom Yseult sacrifices to her intrigue with Tristram, or those damsels whom Flamenca gives over to the squires of her lover Guillem; at best, the wife of one of her husband's subalterns, or some sister or aunt or widow kept by charity. Round this lady—the stately, proud lady perpetually described by mediæval poets—flutters the swarm of young men, all day long, in her path: serving her at meals, guarding her apartments, nay, as pages, admitted even into her most secret chamber; meeting her for ever in the narrowness of that castle life, where every unnecessary woman is a burden usurping the place of a soldier, and, if possible, replaced by a man. Servants, lacqueys, and enjoying the privileges of ubiquity of lacqueys, yet, at the same time, men of good birth and high breeding, good at the sword and at the lute; bound to amuse this highborn woman, fading away in the monotony of feudal life, with few books to read or unable to read them, and far above all the household concerns which devolve on

the butler, the cellarer, the steward, the gentleman honourably employed as a servant. To them, to these young men, with few or no young women of their own age with whom to associate, and absolutely no unmarried girls who could be a desirable match, the lady of the castle speedily becomes a goddess, the impersonation at once of that feudal superiority before which they bow, of that social perfection which they are commanded to seek, and of that womankind of which the castle affords so few examples. To please her, this lazy, bored, highbred woman, with all the squeamishness and caprice of high birth and laziness about her, becomes their ideal; to be favourably noticed, their highest glory; to be loved, these wretched mortals, by this divinity—that thought must often pass through their brain and terrify them with its delicious audacity; oh no, such a thing is not possible. But it is. The lady at first, perhaps most often, singles out as a pastime some young knight, some squire, some page; and, in a half-queenly, half-motherly way, corrects, rebukes his deficiencies, undertakes to teach him his duty as a servant. The romance of the “*Petit Jehan de Saintré*,” written in the fifteenth century, but telling, with a delicacy of cynicism worthy of Balzac, what must have been the old, old story of the whole feudal Middle Ages, shows the manner in which, while feeling that he is being trained to knightly courtesy and honour, the young man in the service of a great feudal lady is gradually taught dissimulation,

lying, intrigue ; is initiated by the woman who looms above him like a saint into all the foulness of adultery. Adultery ; a very ugly word, which must strike almost like a handful of mud in the face whosoever has approached this subject of mediæval love in admiration of its strange delicacy and enthusiasm. Yet it is a word which must be spoken, for in it is the explanation of the whole origin and character of this passion which burst into song in the early Middle Ages. This almost religious love, this love which conceives no higher honour than the service of the beloved, no higher virtue than eternal fidelity—this love is the love for another man's wife. Between unmarried young men and young women, kept carefully apart by the system which gives away a girl without her consent and only to a rich suitor, there is no possibility of love in these early feudal courts ; the amours, however licentious, between kings' daughters and brave knights, of the Carolingian tales, belong to a different rank of society, to the prose romances made up in the fourteenth century for the burgesses of cities ; the intrigues, ending in marriage, of the princes and princesses of the cycle of Amadis, belong to a different period, to the fifteenth century, and to courts where feudal society scarcely exists ; the squires, the young knights who hang about a great baronial establishment of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, have still to make their fortune, and do not dream of marriage. The husband, on the other hand, the great lord

or successful knightly adventurer, married late in life, and married from the necessity, for ever pressing upon the feudal proprietor, of adding on new fiefs and new immunities, of increasing his importance and independence in proportion to the hourly increasing strength and claims of the overlord, the king, who casts covetous eyes upon him—the husband has not married for love; he has had his love affairs with the wives of other men in his day, or may still have them; this lady is a mere feudal necessity, she is required to give him a dower and give him an heir, that is all. If the husband does not love, how much less can the wife; married, as she is, scarce knowing what marriage is, to a man much older than herself, whom most probably she has never seen, to whom she is a mere investment. Nay, there is not even the after-marriage love of the ancients: this wife is not the housekeeper, the woman who works that the man's house may be rich and decorous; not even the nurse of his children, for the children are speedily given over to the squires and duennas; she is the woman of another family who has come into his, the stranger who must be respected (as that most typical mediæval wife, Eleanor of Guienne, was respected by her husbands) on account of her fiefs, her vassals, her kinsfolk; but who cannot be loved. Can there be love between man and wife? There cannot be love between man and wife. This is no answer of mine, fantastically deduced from mediæval poetry. It is the

answer solemnly made to the solemnly asked question by the Court of Love held by the Countess of Champagne in 1174, and registered by Master Andrew the King of France's chaplain: "Dicimus enim et stabilito tenore firmamus amorem non posse inter duos jugales suas extendere vires." And the reason alleged for this judgment brings us back to the whole conception of mediæval love as a respectful service humbly waiting for a reward: "For," pursues the decision published by André le Chapelain, "whereas lovers grant to each other favours freely and from no legal necessity, married people have the duty of obeying each other's wishes and of refusing nothing to one another." "No love is possible between man and wife," repeat the Courts of Love which, consisting of all the highborn ladies of the province and presided by some mighty queen or princess, represent the social opinions of the day. "But this lady," says a knight (Miles) before the love tribunal of Queen Eleanor, "promised to me that if ever she should lose the love of her lover, she would take me in his place. She has wedded the man who was her lover, and I have come to claim fulfilment of her promise." The court discusses for awhile. "We cannot," answers Queen Eleanor, "go against the Countess of Champagne's decision that love cannot exist between man and wife. We therefore desire this lady to fulfil her promise and give you her love." Again, there come to the Court of Love of the Viscountess of Narbonne a knight and a lady, who desire to know

whether, having been once married, but since divorced, a love engagement between them would be honourable. The viscountess decides that "Love between those who have been married together, but who have since been divorced from one another, is not to be deemed reprehensible; nay, that it is to be considered as honourable." And these Courts of Love, be it remarked, were frequently held on occasion of the marriage of great personages; as, for instance, of that between Louis VII. and Eleanor of Poitiers in 1137. The poetry of the early Middle Ages follows implicitly the decisions of these tribunals, which reveal a state of society to which the nearest modern approach is that of Italy in the eighteenth century, when, as Goldoni and Parini show us, as Stendhal (whose "*De l'Amour*" may be taken as the modern "*Breviari d'Amor*") expounds, there was no impropriety possible as long as a lady was beloved by any one except her own husband. No love, therefore, between unmarried people (the cyclical romances, as before stated, and the *Amadis*s, belong to another time of social condition, and the only real exception to my rule of which I can think is the lovely French tale of "*Aucassin et Nicolette*"); and no love between man and wife. But love there must be; and love there consequently is; love for the married woman from the man who is not her husband. The feudal lady, married without being consulted and without having had a chance of knowing what love is, yet lives to know love; lives to be

taught it by one of these many bachelors bound to flutter about her in military service or social duty; lives to teach it herself. And she is too powerful in her fiefs and kinsmen, too powerful in the public opinion which approves and supports her, to be hampered by her husband. The husband, indeed, has grown up in the same habits, has known, before marrying, the customs sanctioned by the Courts of Love; he has been the knight of some other man's wife in his day, what right has he to object? As in the days of Italian *cecisbei*, the early mediæval lover might say with Goldoni's Don Alfonso or Don Roberto, "I *serve* your wife—such or such another serves mine, what harm can there be in it?" ("Io servo vostra moglie, Don Eugenio favorisce la mia; che male c'è?" I am quoting from memory.) And as a fact, we hear little of jealousy; the amusement of En Barral when Peire Vidal came in and kissed his sleeping wife; and the indignation of all Provence for the murder of Guillems de Cabestanh (buried in the same tomb with the lady who had been made to eat of his heart)—showing from opposite sides how the society accustomed to Courts of Love looked upon the duties of husbands.

Such was the social life in those feudal courts whence first arises the song of mediæval love, and that this is the case is proved by the whole huge body of early mediæval poetry. We must not judge, as I have said, either by poems of much earlier date,

like the Nibelungen and the Carolingian *chansons de geste*, which merely received a new form in the early Middle Ages ; still less from the prose romances of Mélusine, Milles et Amys, Palemon and Arcite, and a host of others which were elaborated only later and under the influence of the quite unfeudal habits of the great cities ; and least of all from that strange late southern cycle of the Amadis, from which, odd as it seems, many of our notions of chivalric love have, through our ancestors, through the satirists or burlesque poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, been inherited. We must look at the tales which, as we are constantly being told by *trouvères*, *troubadours*, and *minnesingers*, were the fashionable reading of the feudal classes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries : the tales best known to us in the colourless respectability of the collection made in the reign of Edward IV. by Sir Thomas Malory, and called by him the "Morte d'Arthur" — of the ladies and knights of Arthur's court ; of the quest of the Grail by spotless knights who were bastards and fathers of bastards ; of the intrigues of Tristram of Lyonesse and Queen Yseult ; of Launcelot and Guenevere ; the tales which Francesca and Paolo read together. We must look, above all, at the lyric poetry of France, Provence, Germany, and Sicily in the early Middle Ages.

Vos qui très bien ameïs i petit mentendeïs  
 Por l'amor de Ihesu les pucelles ameïs.  
 Nos trouvons en escriis de sainte auctoriteïs  
 Ke pucelle est la flor de loyaulment ameïr.

This strange entreaty to love the maidens for the sake of Christ's love, this protest of a nameless northern French poet (Wackernagel, *Altfranzösische Lieder* and *Leiche IX.*) against the adulterous passion of his contemporaries, comes to us, pathetically enough, solitary, faint, unnoticed in the vast chorus, boundless like the spring song of birds or the sound of the waves, of poets singing the love of other men's wives. But, it may be objected—how can we tell that these love songs, so carefully avoiding all mention of names, are not addressed to the desired bride, to the legitimate wife of the poet? For several reasons; and mainly, for the crushing evidence of an undefinable something which tells us that they are not. The other reasons are easily stated. We know that feudal habits would never have allowed to unmarried women (and women were married when scarcely out of their childhood) the opportunities for the relations which obviously exist between the poet and his lady; and that, if by some accident a young knight might fall in love with a girl, he would address not her but her parents, since the Middle Ages, who were indifferent to adultery, were, like the southern nations among whom the married woman is not expected to be virtuous, extreme sticklers for the purity of their unmarried womankind. Further, we have no instance of an unmarried woman being ever addressed during the early Middle Ages, in those terms of social respect—*madame*, *domna*, *frowe*, *madonna*—which essen-

tially belong to the mistress of a household ; nor do these stately names fit in with any theory which would make us believe that the lady addressed by the poet is the jealously guarded daughter of the house with whom he is plotting a secret marriage, or an elopement to end off in marriage. This is not the way that Romeo speaks to Juliet, nor even that the princesses in the cyclical romances and in the Amadis are wooed by their bridegrooms. This is not the language of a lover who is broaching his love, and who hopes, however timidly, to consummate it before all the world by marriage. It is obviously the language of a man either towards a woman who is taking a pleasure in keeping him dangling without favours which she has implicitly or explicitly promised ; or towards a woman who is momentarily withholding favours which her lover has habitually enjoyed. And in a large proportion of cases the poems of trouvères, troubadours, and minnesingers are the expression of fortunate love, the fond recollection or eager expectation of meetings with the beloved. All this can evidently not be connected with the wooing, however stealthy, however Romeo-and-Juliet-like of a bride ; still less can it be explained in reference to love within wedlock. A man does not, however loving, worship his wife as his social superior ; he does not address her in titles of stiff respect ; he does not sigh and weep and supplicate for love which is his due, and remind his wife that she owes it him in return

for loyal, humble, discreet service. Above all, a man (except in some absurd comedy perhaps, where the husband, in an age of *cicisbeos*, is in love with his own wife and dares not admit it before the society which holds "that there can be no love between married folk")—a husband, I repeat, does not beg for, arrange, look forward to, and recall with triumph or sadness, secret meetings with his own wife. Now the secret meeting is, in nearly every aristocratic poet of the early poetry, the inevitable result of the humble praises and humble requests for kindness; it is, most obviously, *the* reward for which the poet is always importuning. Mediæval love poetry, compared with the love poetry of Antiquity and the love poetry of the revival of letters, is, in its lyric form, decidedly chaste; but it is perfectly explicit; and, for all its metaphysical tendencies and its absence of clearly painted pictures, the furthest possible removed from being Platonic. One of the most important, characteristic, and artistically charming categories of mediæval love lyrics is that comprising the Provençal *serena* and *alba*, with their counterparts in the *langue d'oïl*, and the so-called *Wachtlieder* of the minnesingers; and this category of love poetry may be defined as the drama, in four acts, of illicit love. The faithful lover has received from his lady an answer to his love, the place and hour are appointed; all the day of which the evening is to bring him this honour, he goes heavy hearted and sighing: "Day, much do you grow for my

grief, and the evening, the evening and the long hope kills me." Thus far the *serena*, the evening song, of Guiraut Riquier. A lovely anonymous *alba*, whose refrain, "Oi deus, oi deus ; de l' alba, tan tost ve!" is familiar to every smatterer of Provençal, shows us the lady and her knight in an orchard beneath the hawthorn, giving and taking the last kisses while the birds sing and the sky whitens with dawn. "The lady is gracious and pleasant, and many look upon her for her beauty, and her heart is all in loving loyalty ; alas, alas, the dawn ! how soon it comes !—" "Oi deus, oi deus ; de l' alba, tan tost ve !" The real *alba* is the same as the German *Wachtlieder*, the song of the squire or friend posted at the garden gate or outside the castle wall, warning the lovers to separate. "Fair comrade (Bel Companho), I call to you singing, 'Sleep no more, for I hear the birds announcing the day in the trees, and I fear that the jealous one may find you ;' and in a moment it will be day, 'Bel Companho, come to the window and look at the signs in the sky ! you will know me a faithful messenger ; if you do it not, it will be to your harm, and in a moment it will be dawn (et ades sera l' alba). Bel Companho, since I left you I have not slept nor raised myself from my knees ; for I have prayed to God the Son of Saint Mary, that he should send me back my faithful comrade, and in a moment it will be dawn !'" In this *alba* of Guiraut de Borneulh, the lover comes at last to the window, and cries to his

watching comrade that he is too happy to care either for the dawn or for the jealous one. The German *Wachtlieder* are even more explicit. "He must away at once and without delay," sings the watchman in a poem of Wolfram, the austere singer of Parzifal and the Grail Quest; "let him go, sweet lady; let him away from thy love so that he keep his honour and life. He trusted himself to me that I should bring him safely hence; it is day . . ." "Sing what thou wilt, watchman," answers the lady, "but leave him here." In a far superior, but also far less chaste, poem of Heinrich von Morungen, the lady, alone and melancholy, wakes up remembering the sad white light of morning, the sad cry of the watchman, which separated her from her knight. Still more frankly, and in a poem which is one of the few real masterpieces of Minnesang, the lady in Walther von der Vogelweide's "Under der linden an der Heide" narrates a meeting in the wood. "What passed between us shall never be known by any! never by any, save him and me—yes, and by the little nightingale that sang *Tandaradei!* The little bird will surely be discreet."

The songs of light love for another's wife of troubadour, trouvère, and minnesinger, seem to have been squeezed together, so that all their sweet and acrid perfume is, so to speak, sublimated, in the recently discovered early Provençal narrative poem called "Flamenca." Like the "Tristram" of Gottfried von

Strassburg, like all these light mediæval love lyrics of which I have been speaking, the rhymed story of "Flamenca," a pale and simple, but perfect petalled daisy, has come up in a sort of moral and intellectual dell in the winter of the Middle Ages—a dell such as you meet in hollows of even the most wind-swept southern hills, where, while all round the earth is frozen and the short grass nibbled away by the frost, may be found even at Christmas a bright sheen of budding wheat beneath the olives on the slope, a yellow haze of sun upon the grass in which the little aromatic shoots of fennel and mint and marigold pattern with greenness the sere brown, the frost-burnt ; where the very leafless fruit trees have a spring-like rosy tinge against the blue sky, and the tufted little osiers flame a joyous orange against the greenness of the hill.

Such spots there are—and many—in the winter of the Middle Ages ; though it is not in them, but where the rain beats, and the snow and the wind tugs, that grow, struggling with bitterness, the great things of the day : the philosophy of Abélard, the love of man of St. Francis, the patriotism of the Lombard communes ; nor that lie dormant, fertilized in the cold earth, the great things of art and thought, the great things to come. But in them arise the delicate winter flowers which we prize : tender, pale things, without much life, things either come too soon or stayed too late, among which is "Flamenca ;" one of those roses, nipped and wrinkled, but stained a brighter red by

the frost, which we pluck in December or in March ; beautiful, bright, scentless roses, which, scarce in bud, already fall to pieces in our hand. "Flamenca" is simply the narrative of the loves of the beautiful wife of the bearish and jealous Count Archambautz, and of Guillems de Nevers, a brilliant young knight who hears of the lady's sore captivity, is enamoured before he sees her, dresses up as the priest's clerk, and speaks one word with her while presenting the mass book to be kissed, every holiday ; and finally deceives the vigilance of the husband by means of a subterranean corridor, which he gets built between his inn and the bath-room of the lady at the famous waters of Bourbon-les-Bains. In this world of "Flamenca," which is in truth the same world as that of the "Romaunt of the Rose," the "Morte d'Arthur," and of the love poets of early France and Germany, conjugal morality and responsibility simply do not exist. It seems an unreal pleasure-garden, with a shadowy guardian—impalpable to us gross moderns—called Honour, but where, as it seems, Love only reigns. Love, not the mystic and melancholy god of the "Vita Nuova," but a foppish young deity, sentimental at once and sensual, of fashionable feudal life : the god of people with no apparent duties towards others, unconscious of any restraints save those of this vague thing called honour ; whose highest mission for the knight, as put in our English "Romaunt of the Rose" is to—

Set thy might and alle thy witte  
 Wymmen and ladies for to plese,  
 And to do thyng that may hem ese ;

while, for the lady, it is expressed with perfect simplicity of shamelessness by Flamenca herself to her damsels, teaching them that the woman must yield to the pleasure of her lover. Now love, when young, when, so to speak, but just born and able to feed (as a newborn child on milk, without hungering for more solid food) on looks and words and sighs ; love thus young, is a fair-seeming godhead, and the devotion to him a pretty and delicate piece of æstheticism. And such it is here in "Flamenca," where there certainly exists neither God nor Christ, both complete absentees, whose priest becomes a courteous lover's valet, whose church the place for amorous rendezvous, whose sacrifice of mass and prayer becomes a means of amorous correspondence : Cupid, in the shape of his slave Guillems de Nevers—become *patarin* (zealot) for love—peeping with shaven golden head from behind the missal, touching the lady's hand and whispering with the words of spiritual peace the declaration of love, the appointment for meeting. God and Christ, I repeat, are absentees. Where they are I know not ; perhaps over the Rhine with the Lollards in their weavers' dens, or over the Alps in the cell of St. Francis ; not here, certainly, or if here, themselves become the mere slaves of love. But this King Love, as long as a mere infant, is a sweet and gracious

divinity, surrounded by somewhat of the freshness and hawthorn sweetness of spring which seem to accompany his favourite Guillems. Guillems de Nevers, "who could still grow," this brilliant knight and troubadour, in his white silken and crimson and purple garments and soundless shoes embroidered with flowers, this prince of tournaments and *tensos*, who hearing the sorrows of the beautiful Flamenca, loves her unseen, sits sighing in sight of her prison bower, and faints like a hero of the Arabian Nights at her name, and has visions of her as St. Francis has of Christ; this younger and brighter Sir Launcelot, is an ideal little figure, whom you might mistake for Love himself as described in the "Romaunt of the Rose;" Love's avatar or incarnation, on whose appearance the year blooms into spring, the fruit trees blossom, the birds sing, the girls dance at eve round the maypoles; behind whom, while reading this poem, we seem to see the corn shine green beneath the olives, the white-blossomed branches slant across the blue sky. For is he not the very incarnation of chivalry, of beauty, and of love? So much for this King Love while but quite young. Unfortunately he is speedily weaned of his baby food of mere blushing glances and sighed-out names; and then his aspect, his kingdom's aspect, the aspect of his votaries, undergoes a change. The profane but charming game of the loving clerk and the missal is exchanged for the more coarse hide-and-seek of hidden causeways and

tightened bolts, with jealous husbands guarding the useless door ; Guillems becomes but an ordinary Don Juan or Lovelace, Flamenca but a sorry, sneaking adulteress, and the gracious damsels mere common sluts, curtseying at the loan (during the interview of nobler folk) of the gallant's squires. For the scent of May, of fresh leaves and fallen blossoms, we get the nauseous vapours of the bath-room ; and, alas, King Love has lost his aureole and his wings and turned keeper of the hot springs, sought out by the gouty and lepers, of Bourbon-les-Bains ; and in closing this book, so delightfully begun, we sicken at the whiff of hot and fetid moral air as we should sicken in passing over the outlet of the polluted hot water.

“But where is the use of telling us all this ?” the reader will ask ; “every one knows that illicit passion existed and exists, and has its chroniclers, its singers in prose and in verse. But what has all this poetry of common adultery to do with a book like the ‘Vita Nuova,’ with that strange new thing, that lifelong worship of a woman, which you call mediæval love ?” This much : that out of this illicit love, and out of it, gross as it looks, alone arises the possibility of the “Vita Nuova ;” arises the possibility of the romantic and semi-religious love of the Middle Ages. Or, rather, let us say that this mere loose love of the *albas* and *Wachtlieder* and “Flamenca,” is the substratum, nay, is the very flesh and blood, of the spiritual passion to which, in later days, we owe the book of Beatrice.

It is a harsh thing to say, but one which all sociology teaches us, that as there exists no sensual relation which cannot produce for its ennoblement a certain amount of passion, so also does there exist no passion (and Phædrus is there to prove it) so vile and loathsome as to be unable to weave about itself a glamour of ideal sentiment. The poets of the Middle Ages strove after the criminal possession of another man's wife. This, however veiled with fine and delicate poetic expressions, is the thing for which they wait and sigh and implore; this is the reward, the supremely honouring and almost sanctifying reward which the lady cannot refuse to the knight who has faithfully and humbly served her. The whole bulk of the love lyrics of the early Middle Ages are there to prove it; and if the allusions in them are not sufficiently clear, those who would be enlightened may study the discussions of the allegorical persons even in the English (and later) version of Guillaume de Lorris' "Roman de la Rose;" and turn to what, were it in *langue d'oc*, we should call a *tenso* of Guillaume li Viniers among Mätzner's "Altfranzösische Liederdichter." The catastrophe of Ulrich von Liechtenstein's "Frowendienst," where the lady, the "virtuous," the "pure," as he is pleased to call her, after making him cut off his finger, dress in leper's clothes, chop off part of his upper lip, and go through the most marvellous Quixotic antics dressed in satin and pearls and false hair as Queen Venus, and jousting in this

costume with every knight between Venice and Styria, all for her honour and glory; pulls the gallant in a basket up to her window, and then lets him drop down into the moat which is no better than a sewer; this grotesque and tragically resented end of Ulrich's first *love service* speaks volumes on the point. The stories in Nostradamus' "Lives of the Troubadours," the incidents in Gottfried's "Tristan und Isolde," nay, the adventures even in our expunged English "Morte d'Arthur," relating to the birth of Sir Galahad, are as explicit as anything in Brantôme or the Queen of Navarre; the most delicate love songs of Provence and Germany are cobwebs spun round Decameronian situations. And all this is permitted, admitted, sanctioned by feudal society even as the *cecisbeos* of the noble Italian ladies were sanctioned by the society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the mediæval castle, where, as we have seen, the lady, separated from her own sex, is surrounded by a swarm of young men without a chance of marriage, and bound to make themselves agreeable to the wife of a military superior; the woman soon ceases to be the exclusive property of her husband, and the husband speedily discovers that the majority, hence public ridicule, are against any attempt at monopolizing her. Thus adultery becomes, as we have seen, accepted as an institution under the name of *service*; and, like all other social institutions, develops a morality of its own—a morality within immorality, of faithfulness

within infidelity. The lady must be true to her knight, and the knight must be true to his lady : the Courts of Love solemnly banish from society any woman who is known to have more than one lover. Faithfulness is the first and most essential virtue of mediæval love ; a virtue unknown to the erotic poets of Antiquity, and which modern times have inherited from the Middle Ages as a requisite, even (as the reproaches of poets of the Alfred de Musset school teach us) in the most completely illicit love. Tristram and Launcelot, the two paragons of knighthood, are inviolably constant to their mistress : the husband may and must be deceived, but not the wife who helps to deceive him. Yseult of Brittany and Elaine, the mother of Galahad, do not succeed in breaking the vows made to Yseult the Fair and to Queen Guenevere. The beautiful lady in the hawthorn *alba* "a son cor en amar lejalmens." But this loyal loving is for the knight who is warned to depart, certainly not for the husband, the *gilos*, in whose despite ("Bels dous amios, baizem nos eu e vos—Aval els pratz on chantols auzellos—*Tot o fassam en despeit del gilos*") they are meeting. The ladies of the minnesingers are "pure," "good," "faithful" (and each and all are pure, good, and faithful, as long as they do not resist) from the point of view of the lover, not of the husband, if indeed a husband be permitted to have any point of view at all. And as fidelity is the essential virtue in these adulterous connections, so in-

fidelity is the greatest crime that a woman (and even a man) can commit, the greatest misfortune which fate can send to an unhappy knight. That he leaves a faithful mistress behind him is the one hope of the knight who, taking the cross, departs to meet the scimitars of Saladin's followers, the fevers, the plagues, the many miserable deaths of the unknown East. "If any lady be unfaithful," says Quienes de Béthune, "she will have to be unfaithful with some base wretch."

Et les dames ki castement vivront  
 Se loiauté font a ceus qui iront ;  
 Et seles font par mal conseil folaje,  
 A lasques gens et mauvais le feron  
 Car tout li bon iront en cest voiage

"I have taken the cross on account of my sins," sings Albrecht von Johansdorf, one of the most earnest of the minnesingers ; "now let God help, till my return, the woman who has great sorrow on my account, in order that I may find her possessed of her honour ; let Him grant me this prayer. But if she change her life (*i.e.*, take to bad courses), then may God forbid my ever returning." The lady is bound (the Courts of Love decide this point of honour) to reward her faithful lover. "A knight," says a lady, in an anonymous German song published by Bartsch, "has served me according to my will. Before too much time elapse, I must reward him ; nay, if all the world were to object, he must have his way with me" ("und waerez al der Werlte leit, so muoz sîn wille an mir

ergân"). But, on the other hand, the favoured knight is bound to protect his lady's good fame.

Se jai mamie en tel point mis,  
 Que tout motroit (m'octroit) sans esformer,  
 Tant doi je miex sonnor gaiter—

thus one of the interlocutors in a French *jeu-parti*, published by Mätzner; a rule which, if we may judge from the behaviour of Tristram and Launcelot, and from the last remnants of mediæval love lore in modern French novels, means simply that the more completely a man has induced a woman to deceive her husband, the more stoutly is he bound to deny, with lies, rows, and blows, that she has ever done anything of the sort. Here, then, we find established, as a very fundamental necessity of this socially recognized adultery, a reciprocity of fidelity between lover and mistress which Antiquity never dreamed of even between husband and wife (Agamemnon has a perfect right to Briseis or Chryseis, but Clytæmnestra has no right to Ægisthus); and which indeed could scarcely arise as a moral obligation except where the woman was not bound to love the man (which the wife is) and where her behaviour towards him depended wholly upon her pleasure, that is to say, upon her satisfaction with his behaviour towards her. This, which seems to us so obvious, and of which every day furnishes us an example in the relations of the modern suitor and his hoped-for wife, could not, at a time when women were married by family

arrangement, arise except as a result of illegitimate love. Horrible as it seems, the more we examine into this subject of mediæval love, the more shall we see that our whole code of Grandisonian chivalry between lovers who intend marriage is derived from the practice of the Launcelots and Gueneveres, not from that of the married people (we may remember the manner in which Gunther woos his wife Brunhilt in the *Nibelungenlied*) of former ages ; nay, the more we shall have to recognize that the very feeling which constitutes the virtuous love of modern poets is derived from the illegitimate loves of the Middle Ages.

Let us examine what are the habits of feeling and thinking which grow out of this reciprocal fidelity due to the absence of all one-sided legal pressure in this illegitimate, but socially legitimated, love of the early Middle Ages ; which are added on to it by the very necessities of illicit connection. The lover, having no right to the favours of his mistress, is obliged, in order to win and to keep them, to please her by humility, fidelity, and such knightly qualities as are the ideal plumage of a man : he must bring home to her, by showing the world her colours victorious in serious warfare, in the scarcely less dangerous play of tournaments, and by making her beauty and virtues more illustrious in his song than are those of other women in the songs of their lovers—he must bring home to her that she has a more worthy servant than her rivals ; he must determine her to select him and

to adhere to her selection. Now mediæval husbands select their wives, instead of being selected ; and once the woman and the dowry are in their hands, trouble themselves but little whether they are approved of or not. On the other hand, the mistress appears to her lover invested with imaginative, ideal advantages such as cannot surround her in the eyes of her husband : she is, in nearly every case, his superior in station and the desired of many beholders ; she is bound to him by no tie which may grow prosaic and wearisome ; she appears to him in no domestic capacity, can never descend to be the female drudge ; her possession is prevented from growing stale, her personality from becoming commonplace, by the difficulty, rareness, mystery, adventure, danger, which even in the days of Courts of Love attach to illicit amours ; above all, being for this man neither the housewife nor the mother, she remains essentially and continually the mistress, the beloved. Similarly the relations between the knight and the lady, untroubled by domestic worries, pecuniary difficulties, and squabbles about children, remain, exist merely as love relations, relations of people whose highest and sole desire is to please one another. Moreover, and this is an important consideration, the lady, who is a mere inexperienced, immature girl when she first meets her husband, is a mature woman, with character and passions developed by the independence of conjugal and social life, when she meets her lover ;

whatever power or dignity of character she may possess is ripe ; whatever intensity of aspiration and passion may be latent is ready to come forth ; for the first time there is equality in love. Equality ? Ah, no. This woman who is the wife of his feudal superior, this woman surrounded by all the state of feudal sovereignty, this woman who, however young, has already known so much of life, this woman whose love is a free gift of grace to the obscure, trembling vassal who has a right not even to be noticed ; this lady of mediæval love must always remain immeasurably above her lover. And, in the long day-dreams while watching her, as he thinks unseen, while singing of her, as he thinks unheard, there cluster round her figure, mistily seen in his fancy, those vague and mystic splendours which surround the new sovereign of the Middle Ages, the Queen of Heaven ; there mingles in the half-terrified raptures of the first kind glance, the first encouraging word, the ineffable passion stored up in the Christian's heart for the immortal beings who, in the days of Bernard and Francis, descend cloud-like on earth and fill the cells of the saints with unendurable glory.

And thus, out of the baseness of habitual adultery, arises incense-like, in the early mediæval poetry, a new kind of love—subtler, more imaginative, more passionate, a love of the fancy and the heart, a love stimulating to the perfection of the individual as is any religion ; nay, a religion, and one appealing more

completely to the complete man, flesh and soul, than even the mystical beliefs of the Middle Ages. And as, in the fantastic song of Ritter Tannhäuser, whose liege lady, so legend tells, was Dame Venus herself, the lady bids the knight go forth and fetch her green water which has washed the setting sun, salamanders snatched from the flame, the stars out of heaven ; so would it seem as if this new power in the world, this poetically worshipped woman, had sent forth mankind to seek wonderful new virtues, never before seen on earth. Nay, rather, as the snowflakes became green leaves, the frost blossoms red and blue flowers, the winter wind a spring-scented breeze, when Bernard de Ventadorn was greeted by his mistress ; so also does it seem as if, at the first greeting of the world by this new love, the mediæval winter had turned to summer, and there had budded forth and flowered a new ideal of manly virtue, a new ideal of womanly grace.

But evil is evil, and evil is its fruit. Out of circumstances hitherto unknown, circumstances come about for the first time owing to the necessities of illegitimate passion, have arisen certain new and nobler characters of sexual love, certain new and beautiful conceptions of manly and womanly nature. The circumstances to which these are owed are pure in themselves, they are circumstances which in more modern times have characterized the perfectly legitimate passion of lovers held asunder by no social law,

but by mere accidental barriers—from Romeo and Juliet to the Master of Ravenswood and Lucy Ashton; and pure so far have been the spiritual results. But these circumstances were due, in the early Middle Ages, to the fact of adultery; and to the new ideal of love has clung, even in its purity, in its superior nobility, an element of corruption as unknown to gross and corrupt Antiquity as was the delicacy and nobility of mediæval love. The most poetical and pathetic of all mediæval love stories, the very incarnation of all that is most lyric at once and most tragic in the new kind of passion, is the story, told and retold by a score of poets and prose writers, of the loves of Yseult of Ireland and of Sir Tristram: who, as the knight was bringing the princess to his uncle and her affianced, King Mark of Cornwall, drank together by a fatal mistake a philter which made all such as partook of it in common inseparable lovers even unto death. Every one knows the result: how Yseult came to her husband already the paramour of Tristram; how Brangwaine, her damsel, feeling that this unhallowed passion was due to her having left within reach the potion intended for the King and Queen of Cornwall, devoted herself, at the price of her maidenhood, to connive in the amours of the lovers whom she had made; how King Mark was deceived, and doubted, and was deceived again; how Tristram fled to Brittany, but how, despite his seeming marriage with another and equally lovely Yseult,

he remained faithful to the Queen of Cornwall. One version tells that Mark slew his nephew while he sat harping to Queen Yseult ; another that Tristram died of grief because his scorned though wedded wife told him that the white-sailed ship, bearing his mistress to meet him, bore the black sail which meant that she was not on board ; but all versions, I think, agree in ending with the fact, that the briar-rose growing on the tomb of the one, slowly trailed its flowers and thorns along till it had reached also the grave of the other, and knit together, as love had knit together with its sweet blossoms and sharp spines, the two fated lovers. The Middle Ages were enthralled by this tale ; but they were also, occasionally, a little shocked by it. Poets and prose writers tampered every now and then with incidents and characters, seeking to make it appear that, owing to the substitution of the waiting-maid, and the neglect of the wedded princess of Brittany, Yseult had never belonged to any man save Tristram, nor Tristram to any woman save Yseult ; or that King Mark had sent his nephew to woo the Irish queen's daughter merely in hopes of his perishing in the attempt, and that his whole subsequent conduct was due to a mere unnatural hatred of a better knight than himself ; touching up here and there with a view to justifying and excusing to some degree the long series of deceits which constituted the whole story. Thus the more timid and less gifted. But when, in the very first years (1210) of the thirteenth

century, the greatest mediæval poet that preceded Dante, the greatest German poet that preceded Goethe, Meister Gottfried von Strassburg, took in hand the old threadbare story of "Tristan und Isolde," he despised all alterations of this sort, and accepted the original tale in its complete crudeness.

For, consciously or unconsciously, Gottfried had conceived this story as a thing wholly unknown in his time, and no longer subject to any of those necessities of constant re-arrangement which tormented mediæval poets: he had conceived it not as a tale, but as a novel. Gottfried himself was probably but little aware of what he was doing; the poem that he was writing probably fell for him into the very same category as the poems of other men; but to us, with our experience of so many different forms of narrative, it must be evident that "Tristan und Isolde" is a new departure, inasmuch as it is not the story of deeds and the people who did them, like the true epic from Homer to the Nibelungen; nor the story of people and the adventures which happened to them, like all romance poetry from "Palemon and Arcite," to the "Orlando Furioso;" but, on the contrary, the story of the psychological relations, the gradual metamorphosis of soul by soul, between two persons. The long introductory story of Tristram's youth must not mislead us, nor all the minute narrations of the killing of dragons and the drinking of love philters: Gottfried, we must remember, was certainly no deliberate

innovator, and these things are the mere inevitable externalities of mediæval poetry, preserved with dull slavish care by the re-writer of a well-known tale, but enclosing in reality something essentially and startlingly modern: the history of a passion and of the spiritual changes which it brings about in those who are its victims.

To meet again this purely psychological interest we must skip the whole rest of the Middle Ages, nay, skip even the great period of dramatic literature, not stopping till we come to the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, to the "Princesse de Clèves," to "Clarissa Harlowe," nay, really, to "The Nouvelle Héloïse." For even in Shakespeare there is always interest and importance in the action and reaction of subsidiary characters, in the event, in the accidental; there is intrigue, chance, misunderstanding, fate—active agencies of which Othello and Hamlet, King Lear and Romeo, are helpless victims; there is, even in this psychological English drama of the Elizabethans, fate in the shape of Iago, in the shape of the Ghost, in the shape of the brothers of Webster's duchess; fate in the shape of a ring, a letter, a drug, but fate always. And in this "Tristan und Isolde" of Gottfried von Strassburg is there not fate also in the love potion intended for King Mark, and given by the mistake of Brangwaine to Mark's bride and his nephew? To this objection, which will naturally occur to any reader who is not

acquainted with the poem of Gottfried, I simply answer, there is not. The love potion there is, but it does not play the same part as do, for instance, the drugs of Friar Laurence and his intercepted letter. Suppose the friar's narcotic to have been less enduring in its action, or his message to have reached in safety, why then Juliet would have been awake instead of asleep, or Romeo would not have supposed her to be dead, and instead of the suicide of the two lovers, we should have had the successful carrying off of Juliet by Romeo. Not so with Gottfried. The philter is there, and a great deal is talked about it; but it is merely one of the old, threadbare trappings of the original story, which he has been too lazy to suppress; it is merely, for the reader, the allegorical signal for an outburst of passion which all our subsequent knowledge of Tristram and Yseult shows us to be absolutely inevitable. In Gottfried's poem, the drinking of the potion signifies merely that all the rambling, mediæval prelude, not to be distinguished from the stories of "Morte d'Arthur," and of half the romances of the Middle Ages, has come to a close and may be forgotten; and that the real work of the great poet, the real, matchless tragedy of the four actors—Tristram, Yseult, Mark, and Brangwaine—has begun.

Yet if we seek again to account to ourselves for this astonishing impression of modernness which we receive from Gottfried's poem, we recognize that it is due to

something far more important than the mere precocious psychological interest ; nay, rather, that this psychological interest is itself dependent upon the fact which makes "Tristan und Isolde," so modern to our feelings. This fact is simply that the poem of Gottfried is the earliest, and yet perhaps almost the completest, example of a literary anomaly which Antiquity, for all its abominations, did not know : the glorification of fidelity in adultery, the glorification of excellence within the compass of guilt. Older times—more distant from our own in spirit, though not necessarily in years—have presented us with many themes of guilt : the guilt which exists according to our own moral standard, but not according to that of the narrator, as the magnificently tragic Icelandic incest story of Sigmund and Signy ; the guilt which has come about no one well knows how, an unfortunate circumstance leaving the sinner virtually stainless, in his or her own eyes and the eyes of others, like the Homeric Helen ; the heroic guilt, where the very heroism seems due to the self-sacrifice of the sinner's innocence, of Judith ; the struggling, remorseful guilt, hopelessly overcome by fate and nature, of Phædra ; the dull and dogged guilt, making the sinner scarce more than a mere physical stumbling-block for others, of the murderer Hagen in the Nibelungenlied ; and, finally, the perverse guilt, delighting in the consciousness of itself, of demons like Richard and Iago, of libidinous furies like the heroines of Tourneur and

Marston. The guilt theme of "Tristan und Isolde" falls into none of these special categories. This theme, unguessed even by Shakespeare, is that of the virtuous behaviour towards one another of two individuals united in sinning against every one else. Gottfried von Strassburg narrates with the greatest detail how Tristram leads to the unsuspecting king the unblushing, unremorseful woman polluted by his own embraces; how Yseult substitutes on the wedding night her spotless damsel Brangwaine for her own sullied self; then, terrified lest the poor victim of her dishonour should ever reveal it, attempts to have her barbarously murdered, and, finally, seeing that nothing can shake the heroic creature's faith, admits her once more to be the remorseful go-between in her amours. He narrates how Tristram dresses as a pilgrim and carries the queen from a ship to the shore, in order that Yseult may call on Christ to bear witness by a miracle that she is innocent of adultery, never having been touched save by that pilgrim and her own husband; and how, when the followers of King Mark have surrounded the grotto in the wood, Tristram places the drawn sword between himself and the sleeping queen, as a symbol of their chastity which the king is too honest to suspect. He draws, with a psychological power truly extraordinary in the beginning of the thirteenth century, the two other figures in this love drama: King Mark, cheated, dishonoured, oscillating between horrible doubt, igno-

minious suspicion and more ignominious credulity, his love for his wife, his trust in his nephew, his incapacity for conceiving ill-faith and fraud, the very gentleness and generosity of his nature, made the pander of guilt in which he cannot believe ; and, on the other side, Brangwaine, the melancholy, mute victim of her fidelity to Yseult, the weak, heroic soul, rewarded only with cruel ingratitude, and condemned to screen and help the sin which she loathes and for which she assumes the awful responsibility. All this does Gottfried do, yet without ever seeming to perceive the baseness and wickedness of this tissue of lies, equivocations, and perjuries in which his lovers hide their passion ; without ever seeming to guess at the pathos and nobility of the man and the woman who are the mere trumpery obstacles or trumpery aids to their amours. He heaps upon Tristram and Yseult the most extravagant praises : he is the flower of all knighthood, and she, the kindest, gentlest, purest, and noblest of women ; he insists upon the wickedness of the world which is for ever waging war upon their passion, and holds up to execration all those who seek to spy out their secret. Gottfried is most genuinely overcome by the ideal beauty of this inextinguishable devotion, by the sublimity of this love which holds the whole world as dross ; the crimes of the lovers are for him the mere culminating point of their moral grandeur, which has ceased to know any guilt save absence of love, any virtue save loving. And so

serene is the old minnesinger's persuasion, that it obscures the judgment and troubles the heart even of his reader ; and we are tempted to ask ourselves, on laying down the book, whether indeed this could have been sinful, this love of Tristram and Yseult which triumphed over everything in the world, and could be quenched only by death. That circle of hell where all those who had sinfully loved were whirled incessantly in the perse=dark, stormy air, appeared in the eyes even of Dante as a place less of punishment than of glory ; and, especially since the Middle Ages, all mankind looks upon that particular hell-pit with admiration rather than with loathing. And herein consists, more even than in any deceptions practised upon King Mark or any ingratitude manifested towards Brangwaine, the sinfulness of Tristram and Yseult : sinfulness which is not finite like the individual lives which it offends, but infinite and immortal as the heart and the judgment which it perverts. For such a tale, and so told, as the tale of Gottfried von Strassburg, makes us sympathize with this fidelity and devotion of a man and woman who care for nothing in the world save for each other, who are dragged and glued together by the desire and habit of mutual pleasure ; it makes us admire their readiness to die rather than be parted, when their whole life is concentrated in their reciprocal sin, when their miserable natures enjoy, care for, know, only this miserable love. It makes us wink with leniency at the

dishonour, the baseness, the cruelty, to which all this easy virtue is due. And such sympathy, such admiration, such leniency, for howsoever short a time they may remain in our soul, leave it, if they ever leave it completely and utterly, less strong, less clean than it was before. We have all of us a lazy tendency to approve of the virtue which costs no trouble; to contemplate in ourselves or others, with a spurious moral satisfaction, the development of this or that virtuous quality in souls which are deteriorating in undoubted criminal self-indulgence. We have all of us, at the bottom of our hearts, a fellow feeling for all human affection; and the sinfulness of sinners like Tristram and Yseult lies largely in the fact that they pervert this legitimate and holy sympathy into a dangerous leniency for any strong and consistent love, into a morbid admiration for any irresistible mutual passion, making us forget that love has in itself no moral value, and that while self-indulgence may often be innocent, only self-abnegation can ever be holy.

The great mediæval German poem of Tristram and Yseult remained for centuries a unique phenomenon; only John Ford perhaps, that grander and darker twin spirit of Gottfried von Strassburg, reviving, even among the morbidly psychological and crime-fascinated followers of Shakespeare, that new theme of evil—the heroism of unlawful love. But Gottfried had merely manipulated with precocious analytical power a mode of feeling and thinking which was universal in the

feudal Middle Ages ; the great epic of adultery was forgotten, but the sympathetic and admiring interest in illegitimate passion remained ; and was transmitted, wherever the Renaissance or the Reformation did not break through such transmission of mediæval habits, as an almost inborn instinct from father to son, from mother to daughter. And we may doubt whether the important class of men and women who write and read the novels of illicit love, could ever have existed, had not the psychological artists of modern times, from Rousseau to George Sand, and from Stendhal to Octave Feuillet, found ready prepared for them in the countries not re-tempered by Protestantism, an association of romance, heroism, and ideality with mere adulterous passion, which was unknown to the corruption of Antiquity and to the lawlessness of the Dark Ages, and which remained as a fatal alloy to that legacy of mere spiritual love which was left to the world by the love poets of early feudalism.

## II.

The love of the troubadours and minnesingers, of the Arthurian tales, which show that love in narrative form, was, as we have seen, polluted by the selfishness, the deceitfulness, the many unclean necessities of adulterous passion. Elevated and exquisite though it was, it could not really purify the relations of man and woman, since it was impure. Nay, we see that through its influence the grave and simple married

love of the earlier tales of chivalry, the love of Siegfried for Chriemhilt, of Roland for his bride Belle Aude, of Renaud for his wife Clarisse, is gradually replaced in later fiction by the irregular love-makings of Huon of Bordeaux, Ogier the Dane, and Artus of Brittany ; until we come at last to the extraordinary series of the Amadis romances, where every hero without exception is the bastard of virtuous parents, who subsequently marry and discover their foundling : a state of things which, even in the corrupt Renaissance, Boiardo and Ariosto found it necessary to reform in their romantic poems. With idealizing refinement, the chivalric love of the French, Provençal, and German poets brings also a kind of demoralization which, from one point of view, makes the spotless songs of Bernard de Ventadour and Arnaud de Mareulh, of Ulrich von Liechtenstein and Frauenlob, less pure than the licentious poems addressed by the Greeks and Romans to women who, at least, were not the wives of other men.

Shall all this idealizing refinement, this almost religious fervour, this new poetic element of chivalric love remain useless ; or serve only to subtly pollute while pretending to purify the great singing passion ? Not so. But to prevent such waste of what in itself is pure and precious, is the mission of another country, of another civilization ; of a wholly different cycle of poets who, receiving the new element of mediæval love after it has passed through and been sifted by a

number of hands shall cleanse and recreate it in the fire of intellectual and almost abstract passion, producing that wonderful essence of love which, as the juices squeezed by alchemists out of jewels purified the body from all its ills, shall purify away all the diseases of the human soul.

While the troubadours and minnesingers had been singing at the courts of Angevine kings and Hohenstauffen emperors, of counts of Toulouse and dukes of Austria, a new civilization, a new political and social system, had gradually been developing in the free burghs of Italy; a new life entirely the reverse of the life of feudal countries. The Italian cities were communities of manufacturers and merchants, into which only gradually, and at the sacrifice of every aristocratic privilege and habit, a certain number of originally foreign feudatories were gradually absorbed. Each community consisted of a number of mercantile families, equal before the law, and illustrious or obscure according to their talents or riches, whose members, instead of being scattered over a wide area like the members of the feudal nobility, were most often gathered together under one roof—sons, brothers, nephews, daughters, sisters and daughters-in-law, forming a hierarchy attending to the business of factory or counting-house under the orders of the father of the family, and to the economy of the house under the superintendence of the mother; a manner of living at once business-like and patriarchal, ex-

pounded by the interlocutors in Alberti's "Governo della Famiglia," and which lasted until the dissolution of the commonwealths and almost to our own times. Such habits imply a social organization, an intercourse between men and women, and a code of domestic morality the exact opposite to those of feudal countries. Here, in the Italian cities, there are no young men bound to loiter, far from their homes, round the wife of a military superior, to whom her rank and her isolation from all neighbours give idleness and solitude. The young men are all of them in business, usually with their own kinsfolk; not in their employer's house, but in his office; they have no opportunity of seeing a woman from dawn till sunset. The women, on their side, are mainly employed at home: the whole domestic arrangement depends upon them, and keeps their hands constantly full; working, and working in the company of their female relatives and friends. Men and women are free comparatively little, and then they are free all together in the same places; hence no opportunities for *tête-à-tête*. Early Italian poetry is fond of showing us the young poet reading his verses or explaining his passion to those gentle, compassionate women learned in love, of whom we meet a troop, beautiful, vague, half-arch, half-melancholy faces, consoling Dante in the "Vita Nuova," and reminding Guido Cavalcanti of his lady far off at Toulouse. But such women almost invariably form a group; they cannot be approached singly. Such

a state of society inevitably produces a high and strict morality. In these early Italian cities (who have borrowed, we must remember, the greater part of their Decameronian literature from France) a case of infidelity is punished ruthlessly ; the lover banished or killed ; the wife for ever lost to the world, perhaps condemned to solitude and a lingering death in the fever tracts, like Pia dei Tolomei. A complacent deceived husband is even more ridiculous (the deceived husband is notoriously the chief laughing stock of all mediæval free towns) than is a jealous husband among the authorized and recognized *cicisbeos* of a feudal court. Indeed the respect for marriage vows inevitable in this busy democratic mediæval life is so strong, that long after the commonwealths have turned into despotisms, and every social tie has been dissolved in the Renaissance, the wives and daughters of men stained with every libidinous vice, nay, of the very despots themselves—Tiberiuses and Neros on a smaller scale—remain spotless in the midst of evil ; and authorized adultery begins in Italy only under the Spanish rule in the late sixteenth century.

Such were the manners and morals of the Italian commonwealths when, about the middle of the thirteenth century, the men of Tuscany, now free and prosperous, suddenly awoke to the consciousness that they had a soul which desired song, and a language which was spontaneously singing. It was the moment when painting was beginning to claim for the figures of real men and women the walls and vaulted spaces

whence had hitherto glowered, with vacant faces and huge ghostlike eyes, mosaic figures, from their shimmering golden ground ; the moment when the Pisan artists had sculptured solemnly draped madonnas and kings not quite unworthy of the carved sarcophagi which stood around them ; the moment when, merging together old Byzantine traditions and Northern examples, the architects of Florence, Siena, and Orvieto conceived a style which made cathedrals into marvellous and huge reliquaries of marble, jasper, alabaster, and mosaics. The mediæval flowering time had come late, very late, in Italy ; but the atmosphere was only the warmer, the soil the richer, and Italy put forth a succession of exquisite and superb immortal flowers of art when the artistic sap of other countries had begun to be exhausted. But the Italians, the Tuscans, audacious in the other arts, were diffident of themselves with regard to poetry. Architecture, painting, sculpture, had been the undisputed field for plebeian craftsmen, belonging exclusively to the free burghs and disdained by the feudal castles ; but poetry was essentially the aristocratic, the feudal art, cultivated by knights and cultivated for kings and barons. It was probably an unspoken sense of this fact which caused the early Tuscan poets to misgive their own powers and to turn wistfully and shyly towards the poets of Provence and of Sicily. There, beyond the seas, under the last lords of Toulouse and the brilliant mongrel Hohenstauffen princes, were courts, knights, and ladies ; there was the tradition of this courtly art

of poetry ; and there only could the sons of Florentine or Sieneſe merchants, clodhoppers in gallantry and ſong, hope to learn the correct ſtyle of thing. Hence the hiſtory of the Italian lyric before Dante is the hiſtory of a ſeries of transformations which connect a ſtyle of poetry abſolutely feudal and feudally immoral, with the hitherto unheard-of platonic love ſubtleties of the “Vita Nuova.” And it is curious, in looking over the collections of early Italian lyrists, to note the alteration in tone as Sicily and the feudal courts are left further and further behind. Ciullo d’ Alcamo, flouriſhing about 1190, is the only Italian-writing poet abſolutely contemporaneous with the earlier and better trouvères, troubadours, and minneſingers ; and he is alſo the only one who reſembles them very cloſely. His famous *tenſo*, beginning “Rosa fresca aulentiffima” (a tolerably faithful translation heads the beautiful collection of the late Mr. D. G. Rossetti), is indeed more explicitly groſs and immoral than the majority of Provençal and German love-ſongs : looſe as are many of the *albas*, *serenas*, *wachtlieder*, and even many of the leſs ſpecial forms of German and Provençal poetry, I am acquainted with none of them which comes up to this ſingular dialogue, in which a man, reſuſing to marry a woman, little by little wins her over to his wiſhes and makes her brazenly invite him to her diſhonour. Between Ciullo d’ Alcamo and his ſucceſſors there is ſome gap of time, and a correſponding want of gradation. Yet the Sicilian

poets of the courts of Hohenstauffen and Anjou, recognizable by their name or the name of their town, Inghilfredi, Manfredi, Ranieri and Ruggierone da Palermo, Tommaso and Matteo da Messina, Guglielmotto d' Otranto, Rinaldo d'Aquino, Pier delle Vigne, either maintain altogether unchanged the tone of the troubadours, or only gradually, as in the remarkable case of the Notary of Lentino, approximate to the platonic poets of Tuscany. The songs of the archetype of Sicilian singers, the Emperor Frederick II., are completely Provençal in feeling as in form, though infinitely inferior in execution. With him it is always the pleasure which he hopes from his lady, or the pleasure which he has had—"Quando ambidue stavamo in allegrezza alla dolce fera ;" "Pregovi donna mia—Per vostra cortesia—E pregovi che sia—Quello che lo core disia." Again : "Sospiro e sto in rancura—Ch' io son sì disioso—E pauroso—Mi fate penare—Ma tanto m' assicura—Lo suo viso amoroso—E lo gioioso—Riso e lo sguardare—E lo parlare—Di questa criatura—Che per paura—Mi face penare—E dimorare—Tant' è fina e pura—Tanto è saggia e cortese—Non credo che pensasse—Nè distornasse—Di ciò che m' impromise." It is, this earliest Italian poetry, like the more refined poetry of troubadours and minnesingers, eminently an importuning of high-born but loosely living women. From Sicily and Apulia poetry goes first, as might be expected (and as probably sculpture went) to the seaport Pisa,

thence to the neighbouring Lucca, considerably before reaching Florence. And as it becomes more Italian and urban, it becomes also, under the strict vigilance of burgher husbands, considerably more platonic. In Bologna, the city of jurists, it acquires (the remark is not mine merely, but belongs also to Carducci) the very strong flavour of legal quibbling which distinguishes the otherwise charming Guido Guinicelli; and once in Florence, among the most subtle of all subtle Tuscans, it becomes at once what it remained even for Dante, saturated with metaphysics: the woman is no longer paramount, she is subordinated to Love himself; to that personified abstraction Amor, the serious and melancholy son of Pagan philosophy and Christian mysticism. The Tuscans had imported from Provence and Sicily the new element of mediæval love, of life devotion, soul absorption in loving; if they would sing, they must sing of this; any other kind of love, at a time when Italy still read and relished her would-be Provençals, Lanfranc Cicala and Sordel of Mantua, would have been unfashionable and unendurable. But in these Italian commonwealths, as we have seen, poets are forced, nilly-willy, to be platonic; an importuning poem found in her work-basket may send a Tuscan lady into a convent, or, like Pia, into the Maremma; an *alba* or a *serena* interrupted by a wool-weaver of Calimara or a silk spinner of Lucca, may mean that the imprudent poet be found weltering in blood under some archway the

next morning. The chivalric sentimentality of feudalism must be restrained ; and little by little, under the pressure of such very different social habits, it grows into a veritable platonic passion. Poets must sing, and in order that they sing, they must adore ; so men actually begin to seek out, and adore and make themselves happy and wretched about women from whom they can hope only social distinctions ; and this purely æsthetic passion goes on by the side, nay, rather on the top, of their humdrum, conjugal life or loosest libertinage. Petrarch's bastards were born during the reign of Madonna Laura ; and that they should have been, was no more a slight or infidelity to her than to the other Madonna, the one in heaven. Laura had a right to only ideal sentiments, ideal relations ; the poet was at liberty to carry more material preferences elsewhere.

But could such love as this exist, could it be genuine ? To my mind, indubitably. For there is, in all our perceptions and desires of physical and moral beauty, an element of passion which is akin to love ; and there is, in all love that is not mere lust, a perception of, a craving for, beauty, real or imaginary which is identical with our merely æsthetic perceptions and cravings ; hence the possibility, once the wish for such a passion present, of a kind of love which is mainly æsthetic, which views the beloved as gratifying merely to the wish for physical or spiritual loveliness, and concentrates upon one exquisite

reality all dreams of ideal perfection. Moreover there comes, to all nobler natures, a love dawning: a brightening and delicate flushing of the soul before the actual appearance of the beloved one above the horizon, which is as beautiful and fascinating in its very clearness, pallor, and coldness, as the unearthly purity of the pale amber and green and ashy rose which streaks the heavens before sunrise. The love of the early Tuscan poets (for we must count Guinicelli, in virtue of his language, as a Tuscan) had been restrained, by social necessities first, then by habit and deliberate æsthetic choice, within the limits of this dawning state; and in this state, it had fed itself off mere spiritual food, and acquired the strange intensity of mere intellectual passions. We give excessive weight, in our days, to spontaneity in all things, apt to think that only the accidental, the unsought, can be vital; but it is true in many things, and truest in all matters of the imagination and the heart, that the desire to experience any sentiment will powerfully conduce to its production, and even give it a strength due to the long incubation of the wish. Thus the ideal love of the Tuscan poets was probably none the weaker, but rather the stronger, for the desire which they felt to sing such passion; nay, rather to hear it singing in themselves. The love of man and wife, of bride and bridegroom, was still of the domain of prose; adulterous love forbidden; and the tradition of, the fervent wish for, the romantic passion of the

troubadours consumed them as a strong artistic craving. Platonic love was possible, doubly possible in souls tense with poetic wants ; it became a reality through the strength of the wish for it.

Nor was this all. In all imaginative passions, intellectual motives are so much fuel ; and in this case the necessity of logically explaining the bodiless passion for a platonic lady, of understanding why they felt in a manner so hitherto unknown to gross mankind, tended greatly to increase the love of these Tuscans, and to bring it in its chastity to the pitch of fervour of more fleshly passions, by mingling with the æsthetic emotions already in their souls the mystical theorizings of transcendental metaphysics, and the half-human, half-supernatural ecstasy of mediæval religion. For we must remember that Italy was a country not merely of manufacturers and bankers, but of philosophers also and of saints.

Among the Italians of the thirteenth century the revival of antique literature was already in full swing ; while in France, Germany, and Provence there had been, in lyric poetry at least, no trace of classic lore. Whereas the trouvères and troubadours had possessed but the light intellectual luggage of a military aristocracy ; and the minnesingers had, for the most part, been absolutely ignorant of reading and writing (Wolfram says so of himself, and Ulrich von Liechtenstein relates how he carried about his lady's letter for days unread until the return of his secretary) ;

the poets of Italy, from Brunetto Latini to Petrarch, were eminently scholars ; men to whom, however much they might be politicians and ringleaders, like Cavalcanti, Donati, and Dante, whatever existed of antique learning was thoroughly well known. Such men were familiar with whatever yet survived of the transcendental theories of Plato and Plotinus ; and they seized at once upon the mythic metaphysics of an antenatal condition, of typical ideas, of the divine essence of beauty, on all the mystic discussions on love and on the soul, as a philosophical explanation of their seemingly inexplicable passion for an unapproachable woman. The lady upon whom the poetic fervour, the mediæval love, inherited from Provence and France, was now expended, and whom social reasons placed quite beyond the reach of anything save the poet's soul and words, was evidently beloved for the sake of that much of the divine essence contained in her nature ; she was loved for purely spiritual reasons, loved as a visible and living embodiment of virtue and beauty, as a human piece of the godhead. So far, therefore, from such an attachment being absurd, as absurd it would have seemed to troubadours and minnesingers, who never served a lady save for what they called a reward ; it became, in the eyes of these platonizing Italians, the triumph of the well-bred soul ; and as such, soon after, a necessary complement to dignities, talents, and wealth, the very highest occupation of a liberal mind. Thus did their smattering of platonic and neo-platonic

philosophy supply the Tuscan poets with a logical reality for this otherwise unreal passion.

But there was something more. In this democratic and philosophizing Italy, there was not the gulf which separated the chivalric poets, men of the sword and not of books, from the great world of religious mysticism; for, though the minnesingers especially were extremely devout and sang many a strange love-song to the Virgin; they knew, they could know, nothing of the contemplative religion of Eckhardt and his disciples—humble and transcendental spirits, whose words were treasured by the sedentary, dreamy town-folk of the Rhine, but would have conveyed no meaning even to the poet of the Grail epic, with its battles and feasts, its booted and spurred slapdash morality, Wolfram von Eschenbach. In the great manufacturing cities of Italy, such religious mysticism spread as it could never spread in feudal courts; it became familiar, both in the mere passionate sermons and songs of the wandering friars, and in the subtle dialectics of the divines; above all, it became familiar to the poets. Now the essence of this contemplative theology of the Middle Ages, which triumphantly held its own against the cut-and-dry argumentation of scholastic rationalism, was love. Love which assuredly meant different things to different minds; a passionate benevolence towards man and beast to godlike simpletons like Francis of Assisi; a mere creative and impassive activity of the divinity to

deep-seeing (so deep as to see only their own strange passionate eyes and lips reflected in the dark well of knowledge) and almost pantheistic thinkers like Master Eckhardt; but love nevertheless, love. "Amor, amore, ardo d' amore," St. Francis had sung in a wild rhapsody, a sort of mystic dance, a kind of furious *malagueña* of divine love; and that he who would wish to know God, let him love—"Qui vult habere notitiam Dei, amet," had been written by Hugo of St. Victor, one of the subtlest of all the mystics. "Amor oculus est," said Master Eckhardt; love, love—was not love then the highest of all human faculties, and must not the act of loving, of perceiving God's essence in some creature which had virtue, the soul's beauty, and beauty, the body's virtue, be the noblest business of a noble life? Thus argued the poets; and their argument, half-passionate, half-scholastic, mixing Plato and Bonaventura, the Schools of Alexandria and the Courts of Love of Provence, resulted in adding all the fervid reality of philosophical and religious aspiration to their clear and cold phantom of disembodied love of woman.

Little by little therefore, together with the carnal desires of Provençals and Sicilians, the Tuscan poets put behind them those little coquetries of style and manner, complications of metre and rhythm learned and fantastic as a woman's plaited and braided hair; those metaphors and similes, like bright flowers or shining golden ribbons dropped from the lady's bosom

and head and eagerly snatched by the lover, which we still find, curiously transformed and scented with the rosemary and thyme of country lanes, in the peasant poetry of modern Tuscany. Little by little does the love poetry of the Italians reject such ornaments ; and cloth itself in that pale garment, pale and stately in heavy folds like a nun's or friar's weeds, but pure and radiant and solemn as the garment of some painted angel, which we have all learned to know from the "Vita Nuova."

To describe this poetry of the immediate precursors and contemporaries of Dante is to the last degree difficult : it can be described only by symbols, and symbols can but mislead us. Dante Rossetti himself, after translating with exquisite beauty the finest poems of this school, showed how he had read into them his own spirit, when he drew the beautiful design for the frontispiece of his collection. These two lovers—the youth kneeling in his cloth of silver robe, lifting his long throbbing neck towards the beloved ; the lady stooping down towards him, raising him up and kissing him ; the mingled cloud of waving hair, the four tight-clasped hands, the four tightly glued lips, the profile hidden by the profile, the passion and the pathos, the eager, wistful faces, nay, the very splendour of brocade robes and jewels, the very sweetness of blooming rose spaliers ; all this is suitable to illustrate this group of sonnets or that of the " House of Life ;" but it is false, false in efflorescence and luxuriance of

passion, splendour and colour of accessory, to the poetry of these early Tuscans. Imaginative their poetry certainly is, and passionate ; indeed the very concentration of imaginative passion ; but imagination and passion unlike those of all other poets ; perhaps because more rigorously reduced to their elements : imagination purely of the heart, passion purely of the intellect, neither of the senses : love in its most essential condition, but, just because an essence, purged of earthly alloys, rarefied, sublimated into a cultus or a philosophy.

These poems might nearly all have been written by one man, were it possible for one man to vary from absolute platitude to something like genius, so homogeneous is their tone : everywhere do we meet the same simplicity of diction struggling with the same complication and subtlety of thought, the same abstract speculation strangely mingled with most individual and personal pathos. The mode of thinking and feeling, the conception of all the large characteristics of love, and of all its small incidents are, in this cycle of poets, constantly the same ; and they are the same in the "Vita Nuova ;" Dante having, it would seem, invented and felt nothing unknown to his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, but merely concentrated their thoughts and feelings by the greater intensesness of his genius. This platonic love of Dante's days is, as I have said, a passion sublimated into a philosophy and a cultus. The philosophy of love engages much

of these poets' attention ; all have treated of it, but Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's elder brother in poetry, is love's chief theologian. He explains, as Eckhardt or Bonaventura might explain the mysteries of God's being and will, the nature and operation of love. "Love, which enamours us of excellence, arises out of pure virtue of the soul, and equals us to God," he tells us ; and subtly developes his theme. This being the case, nothing can be more mistaken than to suppose, as do those of little sense, that Love is blind, and goes blindly about ("Da sentir poco, e da credenza vana—Si move il dir di cotal grossa gente—Ch' amor fa cieco andar per lo suo regno"). Love is omniscient, since love is born of the knowledge and recognition of excellence. Such love as this is the only true source of happiness, since it alone raises man to the level of the divinity. Cavalcanti has in him not merely the subtlety but the scornfulness of a great divine. His wrath against all those who worship or defend a different god of Love knows no bounds. "I know not what to say of him who adores the goddess born of Saturn and sea-foam. His love is fire : it seems sweet, but its result is bitter and evil. He may indeed call himself happy ; but in such delights he mingles himself with much baseness." Such is this god of Love, who, when he descended into Dante's heart, caused the spirit of life to tremble terribly in his secret chamber, and trembling to cry, "Lo, here is a god stronger than myself, who coming will rule over

me. *Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi!*"

The god, this chaste and formidable archangel Amor, is the true subject of these poets' adoration; the woman into whom he descends by a mystic miracle of beauty and of virtue becomes henceforward invested with somewhat of his awful radiance. She is a gentle, gracious lady; a lovable and loving woman, in describing whose grey-green eyes and colour as of snow tinted with pomegranate, the older Tuscans would fain linger, comparing her to the new-budded rose, to the morning star, to the golden summer air, to the purity of snowflakes falling silently in a serene sky; but the sense of the divinity residing within her becomes too strong. From her eyes dart spirits who strike awe into the heart; from her lips come words which make men sigh; on her passage the poet casts down his eyes; notions, all these, with which we are familiar from the "*Vita Nuova*;" but which belong to Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, nay, even to Guinicelli, quite as much as to Dante. The poet bids his verse go forth to her, but softly; and stand before her with bended head, as before the Mother of God. She is a miracle herself, a thing sent from heaven, a spirit, as Dante says in that most beautiful of all his sonnets, the summing up of all that the poets of his circle had said of their lady—"Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare."

"She passes along the street so beautiful and

gracious," says Guinicelli, "that she humbles pride in all whom she greets, and makes him of our faith if he does not yet believe. And no base man can come into her presence. And I will tell you another virtue of her : no man can think ought of evil as long as he looks upon her." "The noble mind which I feel, on account of this youthful lady who has appeared, makes me despise baseness and vileness," says Lapo Gianni. The women who surround her are glorified in her glory, glorified in their womanhood and companionship with her. "The ladies around you," says Cavalcanti, "are dear to me for the sake of your love ; and I pray them as they are courteous, that they should do you all honour." She is, indeed, scarcely a woman, and something more than a saint : an avatar, an incarnation of that Amor who is born of virtue and beauty, and raises men's minds to heaven ; and when Cavalcanti speaks of his lady's portrait behind the blazing tapers of Orsanmichele, it seems but natural that she should be on an altar, in the Madonna's place. The idea of a mysterious incarnation of love in the lady, or of a mystic relationship between her and love, returns to these poets. Lapo Gianni tells us first that she is Amor's sister, then speaks of her as Amor's bride ; nay, in this love theology of the thirteenth century, arises the same kind of confusion as in the mystic disputes of the nature of the Godhead. A Sienese poet, Ugo da Massa, goes so far as to say, "Amor and I are all one thing ; and we have one will

and one heart ; and if I were not, Amor were not ; mind you, do not think I am saying these things from subtlety ('e non pensate ch' io 'l dica per arte') ; for certainly it is true that I am love, and he who should slay me would slay love."

Together with the knowledge of public life and of scholastic theories, together with the love of occult and cabalistic science, and the craft of Provençal poetry, Dante received from his Florence of the thirteenth century the knowledge of this new, this exotic and esoteric intellectual love. And, as it is the mission of genius to gather into an undying whole, to model into a perfect form, the thoughts and feelings and perceptions of the less highly endowed men who surround it, so Dante moulded out of the love passion and love philosophy of his day the "Vita Nuova." Whether the story narrated in this book is fact ; whether a real woman whom he called Beatrice ever existed ; some of those praiseworthy persons, who prowl in the charnel-house of the past, and put its poor fleshless bones into the acids and sublimes of their laboratory, have gravely doubted. But such doubts cannot affect us. For if the story of the "Vita Nuova" be a romance, and if Beatrice be a mere romance heroine, the real meaning and value of the book does not change in our eyes ; since, to concoct such a tale, Dante must have had a number of real experiences which are fully the tale's equivalent ; and to conceive and create such a figure as Beatrice, and

such a passion as she inspires her poet, he must have felt as a poignant reality the desire for such a lady, the capacity for such a love. A tale merely of the soul, and of the soul's movements and actions, this "Vita Nuova;" so why should it matter if that which could never exist save in the spirit, should have been but the spirit's creation? It is, in its very intensity, a vision of love; what if it be a vision merely conceived and never realized? Hence the futility of all those who wish to destroy our faith and pleasure by saying "all this never took place." Fools, can you tell what did or did not take place in a poet's mind? Be this as it may, the "Vita Nuova," thank heaven, exists; and, thank heaven, exists as a reality to our feelings. The longed-for ideal, the perfection whose love, said Cavalcanti, raises us up to God, has seemed to gather itself into a human shape; and a real being has been surrounded by the halo of perfection emanated from the poet's own soul. The vague visions of glory have suddenly taken body in this woman, seen rarely, at a distance; the woman whom, as a child, the poet, himself a child, had already looked at with the strange, ideal fascination which we sometimes experience in our childhood. People are apt to smile at this opening of the "Vita Nuova;" to put aside this narrative of childish love together with the pathetic little pedantries of learned poetry and Kabbala, of the long gloses to each poem, and the elaborate calculations of the recurrence and combination of the number nine (and

that curious little bit of encyclopædic display about the Syrian month *Tismin*) as so much pretty local colouring or obsolete silliness. But there is nothing at which to laugh in such childish fascinations ; the wonderful, the perfect, is more open to us as children than it is afterwards : a word, a picture, a snatch of music will have for us an ineffable, mysterious meaning ; and how much more so some human being, often some other, more brilliant child from whose immediate contact we are severed by some circumstance, perhaps by our own consciousness of inferiority, which makes that other appear strangely distant, above us, moving in a world of glory which we scarcely hope to approach ; a child sometimes, or sometimes some grown person, beautiful, brilliant, who sings or talks or looks at us, the child, with ways which we do not understand, like some fairy or goddess. No indeed, there is nothing to laugh at in this, in this first blossoming of that love for higher and more beautiful things, which in most of us is trodden down, left to wither, by our maturer selves ; nothing to make us laugh ; nay, rather to make us sigh that later on we see too well, see others too much on their real level, scrutinize too much ; too much, alas, for what at best is but an imperfect creature. And in this state of fascination does the child Dante see the child Beatrice, as a strange, glorious little vision from a childish sphere quite above him ; treasuring up that vision, till with his growth it expands and grows more beautiful

and noble, but none the less fascinating and full of awfulness. When, therefore, the grave young poet, full of the yearning for Paradise (but Paradise vaguer, sweeter, less metaphysic and theological than the Paradise of his manhood); as yet but a gracious, learned youth, his terrible moral muscle still undeveloped by struggle, the noble and delicate dreamer of Giotto's fresco, with the long, thin, almost womanish face, marked only by dreamy eyes and lips, wandering through this young Florence of the Middle Ages—when, I say, he meets after long years, the noble and gentle woman, serious and cheerful and candid; and is told that she is that same child who was the queen and goddess of his childish fancies; then the vague glory with which his soul is filled expands and enwraps the beloved figure, so familiar and yet so new. And the blood retreats from his veins, and he trembles; and a vague god within him, half allegory, half reality, cries out to him that a new life for him has begun. Beatrice has become the ideal; Beatrice, the real woman, has ceased to exist; the Beatrice of his imagination only remains, a piece of his own soul embodied in a gracious and beautiful reality, which he follows, seeks, but never tries to approach. Of the real woman he asks nothing; no word throughout the “*Vita Nuova*” of entreaty or complaint, no shadow of desire, not a syllable of those reproaches of cruelty which Petrarch is for ever showering upon Laura. He desires nothing of Beatrice, and Beatrice cannot act

wrongly ; she is perfection, and perfection makes him who contemplates humble at once and proud, glorifying his spirit. Once, indeed, he would wish that she might listen to him ; he has reason to think that he has fallen in her esteem, has seemed base and uncourteous in her eyes, and he would explain. But he does not wish to address her ; it never occurs to him that she can ever feel in any way towards him ; it is enough that he feels towards her. Let her go by and smile and graciously salute her friends : the sight of her grave and pure regalness, nay, rather divinity, of womanhood, suffices for his joy ; nay, later the consciousness comes upon him that it is sufficient to know of her existence and of his love even without seeing her. And, as must be the case in such ideal passion, where the action is wholly in the mind of the lover, he is at first ashamed, afraid ; he feels a terror lest his love, if known to her, should excite her scorn ; a horror lest it be misunderstood and befouled by the jests of those around him, even of those same gentle women to whom he afterwards addresses his praise of Beatrice. He is afraid of exposing to the air of reality this ideal flower of passion. But the moment comes when he can hide it no longer ; and, behold, the passion flower of his soul opens out more gloriously in the sunlight of the world. He is proud of his passion, of his worship ; he feels the dignity and glory of being the priest of such a love. The women all round, the beautiful, courteous women, of whom, only just now,

he was so dreadfully afraid, become his friends and confidants ; they are quite astonished (half in love, perhaps, with the young poet) at this strange way of loving ; they sympathize, admire, are in love with his love for Beatrice. And to them he speaks of her rather than to men, for the womanhood which they share with his lady consecrates them in his eyes ; and they, without jealousy towards this ideal woman, though perhaps not without longing for this ideal love, listen as they might listen to some new and unaccountably sweet music, touched and honoured, and feeling towards Dante as towards some beautiful, half-mad thing. He talks of her, sings of her, and is happy ; the strangest thing in this intensely real narrative of real love is this complete satisfaction of the passion in its own existence, this complete absence of all desire or hope. But this happiness is interrupted by the sudden, terrible thought that one day all this must cease ; the horrible, logical necessity coming straight home to him, that one day she must die—*“Di necessità conviene che la gentilissima Beatrice alcuna volta si muoia.”* There is nothing truer, more intensely pathetic, in all literature, than this frightful pang of evil, not real, but first imagined ; this frightful nightmare vision of the end coming when reality is still happy. Have we not all of us at one time felt the horrible shudder of that sudden perception that happiness must end ; that the beloved, the living, must die ; that this thing the present, which we clasp tight

with our arms, which throbs against our breast, will in but few moments be gone, vanished, leaving us to grasp mere phantom recollections? Compared with this the blow of the actual death of Beatrice is gentle. And then, the truthfulness of his narration how, with yearning, empty heart, hungering after those poor lost realities of happiness, after that occasional glimpse of his lady, that rare catching of her voice, that blessed consciousness of her existence, he little by little lets himself be consoled, cradled to sleep like a child which has sobbed itself out, in the sympathy, the vague love, of another—the Donna della Finestra—with whom he speaks of Beatrice; and the sudden, terrified, starting up and shaking off of any such base consolation, the wrath at any such mental infidelity to the dead one, the indignant impatience with his own weakness, with his baseness in not understanding that it is enough that Beatrice has lived and that he has loved her, in not feeling that the glory and joy of the ineffaceable past is sufficient for all present and future. A revolution in himself which gradually merges in that grave final resolve, that sudden seeing how Beatrice can be glorified by him, that solemn, quiet, brief determination not to say any more of her as yet; not till he can show her transfigured in Paradise. “After this sonnet there appeared unto me a marvelous vision, in which I beheld things that made me propose unto myself to speak no more of this blessed one, until the time when I might more worthily treat

of her. And that this may come to pass, I strive with all my endeavour, even as she truly knows it. Thus, if it should please Him, through whom all things do live, that my life continue for several more years, I hope to say of her such things as have never been said of any lady. And then may it please Him, who is the lord of all courtesy, that my soul shall go forth to see the glory of its lady, that is to say, of that blessed Beatrice, who gloriously looks up into the face of Him, *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus.*"

Thus ends the "Vita Nuova;" a book, to find any equivalent for whose reality and completeness of passion, though it is passion for a woman whom the poet scarcely knows and of whom he desires nothing, we must go back to the merest fleshly love of Antiquity, of Sappho or Catullus; for modern times are too hesitating and weak. So at least it seems; but in fact, if we only think over the matter, we shall find that in no earthly love can we find this reality and completeness: it is possible only in love like Dante's. For there can be no unreality in it: it is a reality of the imagination, and leaves, with all its mysticism and idealism, no room for falsehood. Any other kind of love may be set aside, silenced, by the activity of the mind; this love of Dante's constitutes that very activity. And, after reading that last page which I have above transcribed, as those closing Latin words echo through our mind like the benediction from an altar, we feel as if we were rising from our knees in some secret

chapel, bright with tapers and dim with incense ; among a crowd kneeling like ourselves ; yet solitary, conscious of only the glory we have seen and tasted, of that love *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus*.

### III.

But is it right that we should feel thus ? Is it right that love, containing within itself the potentialities of so many things so sadly needed in this cold real world, as patience, tenderness, devotion, and loving-kindness—is it right that love should thus be carried away out of ordinary life and enclosed, a sacred thing for contemplation, in the shrine or chapel of an imaginary Beatrice ? And, on the other hand, is it right that into the holy places of our soul, the places where we should come face to face with the unattainable ideal of our own conduct that we may strive after something nobler than mere present pleasure and profit—is it right that into such holy places, destined but for an abstract perfection, there should be placed a mere half-unknown, vaguely seen woman ? In short, is not this “Vita Nuova” a mere false ideal, one of those works of art which, because they are beautiful, get worshipped as holy ?

This question is a grave one, and worthy to make us pause. The world is full of instances of the fatal waste of feelings misapplied : of human affections, human sympathy and compassion, so terribly neces-

sary to man, wasted in various religious systems, upon Christ and God: of religious aspirations, contemplation, worship, and absorption, necessary to the improvement of the soul, wasted in various artistic or poetic crazes upon mere pleasant works, or pleasant fancies, of man; wastefulness of emotions, wastefulness of time, which constitute two-thirds of mankind's history and explain the vast amount of evil in past and present. The present question therefore becomes, is not this "Vita Nuova" merely another instance of this lamentable carrying off of precious feelings in channels where they result no longer in fertilization, but in corruption? The Middle Ages, especially, in its religion, its philosophy, nay, in that very love of which I am writing, are one succession of such acts of wastefulness. This question has come to me many a time, and has left me in much doubt and trouble. But on reflection I am prepared to answer that such doubts as these may safely be cast behind us, and that we may trust that instinct which, whenever we lay down the "Vita Nuova," tells us that to have felt and loved this book is one of those spiritual gains in our life which, come what may, can never be lost entirely.

The "Vita Nuova" represents the most exceptional of exceptional moral and intellectual conditions. Dante's love for Beatrice is, in great measure, to be regarded as an extraordinary and exquisite work of art, produced not by the volition of man, but by the accidental combination of circumstances. It is no

more suited to ordinary life than would a golden and ivory goddess of Phidias be suited to be the wife of a mortal man. But it may not therefore be useless; nay, it may be of the highest utility. It may serve that high utilitarian mission of all art, to correct the real by the ideal, to mould the thing as it is in the semblance of the thing as it should be. Herein, let it be remembered, consists the value, the necessity of the abstract and the ideal. In the long history of evolution we have now reached the stage where selection is no longer in the mere hands of unconscious nature, but of conscious or half-conscious man; who makes himself, or is made by mankind, according to not merely physical necessities, but to the intellectual necessity of realizing the ideal, of pursuing the object, of imitating the model, before him. No man will ever find the living counterpart of that chryselephantine goddess of the Greeks; ivory and gold, nay, marble, fashioned by an artist, are one thing; flesh is another, and flesh fashioned by mere blind accident. But the man who should have beheld that Phidian goddess, who should have felt her full perfection, would not have been as easily satisfied as any other with a mere commonplace living woman; he would have sought—and seeking, would have had more likelihood of finding—the woman of flesh and blood who nearest approached to that ivory and gold perfection. The case is similar with the “*Vita Nuova*.” No earthly affection, no natural love of man for

woman, of an entire human being, body and soul, for another entire human being, can ever be the counterpart of this passion for Beatrice, the passion of a mere mind for a mere mental ideal. But if the old lust-fattened evil of the world is to diminish rather than to increase, why then every love of man for woman and of woman for man should tend, to the utmost possibility, to resemble that love of the "Vita Nuova." For mankind has gradually separated from brute kind merely by the development of those possibilities of intellectual and moral passion which the animal has not got; an animal man will never cease to be, but a man he can daily more and more become, until from the obscene goat-legged and goat-faced creature which we commonly see, he has turned into something like certain antique fauns: a beautiful creature, not noticeably a beast, a beast in only the smallest portion of his nature. In order that this may come to pass—and its coming to pass means, let us remember, the enormous increase of happiness and diminution of misery upon earth—it is necessary that day by day and year by year there should enter into man's feelings, emotions, and habits, into his whole life, a greater proportion of that which is his own, and is not shared by the animal; that his actions, preferences, the great bulk of his conscious existence, should be busied with things of the soul, truth, good, and beauty, and not with things of the body. Hence the love of such a gradually improving and humanizing man for a gradually improving

and humanizing woman, should become, as much as is possible, a connection of the higher and more human, rather than of the lower and more bestial, portions of their nature ; it should tend, in its reciprocal stimulation, to make the man more a man, the woman more a woman, to make both less of the mere male and female animals that they were. In brief, love should increase, instead, like that which oftenest profanes love's name, of diminishing, the power of aspiration, of self-direction, of self-restraint, which may exist within us. Now to tend to this is to tend towards the love of the "Vita Nuova ;" to tend towards the love of the "Vita Nuova" is to tend towards this. Say what you will of the irresistible force of original constitution, it remains certain, and all history is there as witness, that mankind—that is to say, the only mankind in whom lies the initiative of good, mankind which can judge and select—possesses the faculty of feeling and acting in accordance with its standard of feeling and action ; the faculty in great measure of becoming that which it thinks desirable to become. Now to have perceived the even imaginary existence of such a passion as that of Dante for Beatrice, must be, for all who can perceive it, the first step towards attempting to bring into reality a something of that passion : the real passion conceived while the remembrance of that ideal passion be still in the mind will bear to it a certain resemblance, even as, according to the ancients, the children born of mothers

whose rooms contained some image of Apollo or Adonis would have in them a reflex, however faint, of that beauty in whose presence they came into existence. In short, it seems to me, that as the "Vita Nuova" embodies the utmost ideal of absolutely spiritual love, and as to spiritualize love must long remain one of the chief moral necessities of the world, there exists in this book a moral force, a moral value, a power in its unearthly passion and purity, which, as much as anything more deliberately unselfish, more self-consciously ethical, we must acknowledge and honour as holy.

As the love of him who has read and felt the "Vita Nuova" cannot but strive towards a purer nature, so also the love of which poets sang became also nobler as the influence of the strange Tuscan school of platonic lyrists spread throughout literature, bringing to men the knowledge of a kind of love born of that idealizing and worshipping passion of the Middle Ages; but of mediæval love chastened by the manners of stern democracy and passed through the sieve of Christian mysticism and pagan philosophy. Of this influence of the "Vita Nuova"—for the "Vita Nuova" had concentrated in itself all the intensest characteristics of Dante's immediate predecessors and contemporaries, causing them to become useless and forgotten—of this influence of the "Vita Nuova," there is perhaps no more striking example than that of the poet who, constituted by nature to be the mere continuator of

the romantically gallant tradition of the troubadours, became, and hence his importance and glory, the mediator between Dante and the centuries which followed him ; the man who gave to mankind, incapable as yet of appreciating or enduring the spiritual essence of the "Vita Nuova," that self-same essence of intellectual love in an immortal dilution. I speak, of course, of Petrarch. His passion is neither ideal nor strong. The man is in love, or has been in love, existing on a borderland of loving and not loving, with the beautiful woman. His elegant, refined, half-knightly, half-scholarly, and altogether courtly mind is delighted with her ; with her curly yellow hair, her good red and white beauty (we are never even told that Dante's Beatrice is beautiful, yet how much lovelier is she not than this Laura, descended from all the golden-haired bright-eyed ladies of the troubadours!), with her manner, her amiability, her purity and dignity in this ecclesiastical Babylon called Avignon. He maintains a semi-artificial love ; frequenting her house, writing sonnet after sonnet, rhetorical exercises, studies from the antique and the Provençal, for the most part ; he, who was born to be a mere troubadour like Ventadour or Folquet, becomes, through the influence of Dante, the type of the poet Abate, of the poetic *cavaliere servente* ; a good, weak man with aspirations, who, failing to get the better of Laura's virtue, doubtless consoles himself elsewhere, but returns to an habitual contemplation of it. He is, being constitutionally a

troubadour, an Italian priest turned partly Provençal, vexed at her not becoming his mistress ; then (having made up his mind, which was but little set upon her), quite pleased at her refusal : it turns her into a kind of Beatrice, and him, poor man, heaven help him ! into a kind of Dante—a Dante for the use of the world at large. He goes on visiting Laura, and writing to her a sonnet regularly so many times a week, and the best, carefully selected, we feel distinctly persuaded, at regular intervals. It is a determined cultus, a sort of half-real affectation, something equivalent to lighting a lamp before a very well-painted and very conspicuous shrine. All his humanities, all his Provençal lore go into these poems—written for whom ? For her ? Decidedly ; for she has no reason not to read the effusions of this amiable, weak priestlet ; she feels nothing for him. For her ; but doubtless also to be handed round in society ; a new sonnet or canzone by that charming and learned man, the Abate Petrarck. There is considerable emptiness in all this : he praises Laura's chastity, then grows impatient, then praises her again ; adores her, calls her cruel, his goddess, his joy, his torment ; he does not really want her, but in the vacuity of his feeling, thinks he does ; calls her alternately the flat, abusive, and eulogistic names which mean nothing. He plays loud and soft with this absence of desire ; he fiddle faddles in descriptions of her, not passionate or burning, but delicately undressed : he sees her (but with chaste

eyes) in her bath ; he envies her veil, &c. ; he neither violently intellectually embraces, nor humbly bows down in imagination before her ; he trifles gracefully, modestly, half-familiarly, with her finger tips, with the locks of her hair, and so forth. Fancy Dante abusing Beatrice ; fancy Dante talking of Beatrice in her bath ; the mere idea of his indignation and shame makes one shameful and indignant at the thought. But this perfect Laura is no Beatrice, or only a half-and-half sham one. She is no ideal figure, merely a figure idealized ; this is no imaginative passion, merely an unreal one. Compare, for instance, the suggestion of Laura's possible death with the suggestion of the possible death of Beatrice. Petrarch does not love sufficiently to guess what such a loss would be. Then Laura does die. Here Petrarch rises. The severing of the dear old habits, the absence of the sweet reality, the terrible sense that all is over, Death, the great poetizer and giver of love philters, all this makes him love Laura as he never loved her before. The poor weak creature, who cannot, like a troubadour, go seek a new mistress when the old one fails him, feels dreadfully alone, the world dreadfully dreary around him ; he sits down and cries, and his crying is genuine, making the tears come also into our eyes. And Laura, as she becomes a more distant ideal, becomes nobler, though noble with only a faint earthly graciousness not comparable to the glory of the living Beatrice. And, as he goes on, growing older and

weaker and more desolate, the thought of a glorified Laura (as all are glorified, even in the eyes of the weakest, by death) begins to haunt him as Dante was haunted by the thought of Beatrice alive. Yet, even at this very time, come doubts of the lawfulness of having thus adored (or thought he had adored) a mortal woman; he does not know whether all this may not have been vanity and folly; he tries to turn his thoughts away from Laura and up to God. Perhaps he may be called on to account for having given too much of his life to a mere earthly love. Then, again, Laura reappears beautified in his memory, and is again tremblingly half-conjured away. He is weak, and sad, and helpless, and alone; and his heart is empty; he knows not what to think nor how to feel; he sobs, and we cry with him. Nowhere could there be found a stranger contrast than this nostalgic craving after the dead Laura, vacillating and troubled by fear of sin and doubt of unworthiness of object, with that solemn ending of the "Vita Nuova," where the name of Beatrice is pronounced for the last time before it be glorified in Paradise, where Dante devotes his life to becoming worthy of saying "such words as have never been said of any lady." The ideal woman is one and unchangeable in glory, and unchangeable is the passion of her lover; but of this sweet dead Laura, whose purity and beauty and cruelty he had sung, without a tremor of self-unworthiness all her life, of her the poor weak Petrarch

begins to doubt, of her and her worthiness of all this love ; and when ? when she is dead and himself is dying.

Such a man is Petrarch ; and yet, by the irresistible purifying and elevating power of the "Vita Nuova," this man came to write not other *albas* and *serenas*, not other love-songs to be added to the love-songs of Provence, but those sonnets and canzoni which for four centuries taught the world, too coarse as yet to receive Dante's passion at first hand, a nobler and more spiritual love. After Petrarch a gradual change takes place in the poetic conception of love : except in learned revivalisms or in loose buffooneries, the mere fleshly love of Antiquity disappears out of literature ; and equally so, though by a slower process of gradual transformation, vanishes also the adoring, but undisguisedly adulterous love of the troubadours and minnesingers. Into the love instincts of mankind have been mingled, however much diluted, some drops of the more spiritual passion of Dante. The *puella* of Antiquity, the noble dame of feudal days, is succeeded in Latin countries, in Italy, and France, and Spain and Portugal, by the *gloriosa donna* imitated from Petrarch, and imitated by Petrarch from Dante ; a long line of shadowy figures, veiled in the veil of Madonna Laura, ladies beloved of Lorenzo and Michael Angelo, of Ariosto, and Tasso, and Camoens, and Cervantes, passes through the world ; nay, even the sprightly mistress of Ronsard, half-bred pagan and troubadour,

has airs of dignity and mystery which make us almost think that in this dainty coquettish French body, of Marie or Hélène or Cassandrette, there really may be an immortal soul. But with the Renaissance—that movement half of mediæval democratic progress, and half of antique revivalism, and to which in reality belongs not merely Petrarch, but Dante, and every one of the Tuscan poets, Guinicelli, Lapo Gianni, Cavalcanti, who broke with the feudal poetry of Provence and Sicily—with the Renaissance, or rather with its long-drawn-out end, comes the close, for the moment, of the really creative activity of the Latin peoples in the domain of poetry. All the things for two centuries which Italy and France and Spain and Portugal (which we must remember for the sake of Camoens) continue to produce, are but developments of parts left untouched; or refinements of extreme detail, as in the case, particularly, of the French poets of the sixteenth century; but poetry receives from these races nothing new or vital, no fresh ideal or fruitful marriage of ideals. And here begins, uniting in itself all the scattered and long-dormant powers of Northern poetry, the great and unexpected action of England. It had slept through the singing period of the Middle Ages, and was awakened, not by Germany or Provence, but by Italy: Boccaccio and Petrarch spoke, and, as through dreams, England in Chaucer's voice, made answer. Again, when the Renaissance had drawn to a close, far on in the sixteenth century, English poetry was

reawakened; and again by Italy. This time it was completely wakened, and arose and slept no more. And one of the great and fruitful things achieved by English poetry in this its final awakening was to give to the world the new, the modern, perhaps the definitive, the final ideal of love. England drank a deep draught—how deep we see from Sidney's and Spenser's sonnets—of Petrarch; and in this pleasant dilution, tasted and felt the burning essence of the "Vita Nuova;" for though Dante remained as the poet, the poet of heaven and hell, this happy half-and-half Petrarch had for full two centuries completely driven into oblivion the young Dante who had loved Beatrice. For England, for this magnificent and marvellous outburst of all the manifold poetic energy stored up and quintupled during that long period of inertness, there could however be no foreign imported ideal of love; there was no possibility of a new series of spectral Lauras, shadows projected by a shadow. Already, long ago, at the first call of Petrarch, Chaucer, by the side of the merely mediæval love types—of brutish lust and doglike devotion—of the Wife of Bath and of Griseldis, had rough-sketched a kind of modern love, the love which is to become that of Romeo and Hamlet, in his story of Palemon and Arcite. Among the poetic material which existed in England at the close of the sixteenth century was the old, long-neglected, domestic love, quiet, undemonstrative, essentially unsinging, of the early Northern (as indeed

also of the Greek and Hindoo) epics ; a domestic love which, in a social condition more closely resembling our own than any other, even than that of the Italian democracies, which had preceded it, among a people who permitted a woman to choose her own husband, and forbade a man wooing another man's wife, had already, in ballads and folk poetry, begun a faint twitter of song. To this love of the man and the woman who hope to marry, strong and tender, but still (as Coleridge remarked of several of the lesser Elizabethan playwrights) most outspokenly carnal, was united by the pure spirit of Spenser, by the unerring genius of Shakespeare, that vivifying drop of burning, spiritual love taken from out of the "Vita Nuova," which had floated, like some sovereign essential oil, on the top of Petrarch's rose-water. Henceforward the world possesses a new kind of love : the love of Romeo, of Hamlet, of Bassanio, of Viola, and of Juliet ; the love of the love poems of Shelley, of Tennyson, of Browning and Browning's wife. A love whose blindness, exaggeration of passion, all that might have made it foolish and impracticable, leads no longer to folly and sin, but to an intenser activity of mankind's imagination of the good and beautiful, to a momentary realization in our fancy of all our vague dreams of perfection ; a love which, though it may cool down imperceptibly and pale in its intenseness, like the sunrise fires into a serene sky, has left some glory round the head of the wife, some glory in the heart of the husband, has

been, however fleeting, a vision of beauty which has made beauty more real. And all this owing to the creation, the storing up, the purification by the Platonic poets of Tuscany, of that strange and seemingly so artificial and unreal thing, mediæval love; the very forms and themes of whose poetry, the *serena* and the *alba*, which had been indignantly put aside by the early Italian lyrists, being unconsciously revived, and purified and consecrated in the two loveliest love poems of Elizabethan poetry: the *serena*, the evening song of impatient expectation, in Spenser's Epithalamium; the *alba*, the dawn song of hurried parting, in the balcony scene of "Romeo and Juliet."

Let us recapitulate. The feudal Middle Ages gave to mankind a more refined and spiritual love, a love all chivalry, fidelity, and adoration, but a love steeped in the poison of adultery; and to save the pure and noble portions of this mediæval love became the mission of the Tuscan poets of that strange school of Platonic love which in its very loveliness may sometimes seem so unnatural and sterile. For, by reducing this mediæval love to a mere intellectual passion, seeking in woman merely a self-made embodiment of cravings after perfection, they cleansed away that deep stain of adultery; they quadrupled the intensity of the ideal element; they distilled the very essential spirit of poetic passion, of which but a few drops, even as diluted by Petrarch, precipitated, when mingled with the earthly passion of future poets, to

the bottom, no longer to be seen or tasted, all baser ingredients.

And, while the poems of minnesingers and troubadours have ceased to appeal to us, and remain merely for their charm of verse and of graceful conceit; the poetry written by the Italians of the thirteenth century for women, whose love was but an imaginative fervour, remains concentrated in the "Vita Nuova;" and will remain for all time the sovereign purifier to which the world must have recourse whenever that precipitate of baser instincts, which thickened like slime the love poetry of Antiquity, shall rise once more and sully the purity of the love poetry of to-day.



## EPILOGUE.



## EPILOGUE.



MORE than a year has elapsed since the moment when, fancying that this series of studies must be well-nigh complete, I attempted to explain in an introductory chapter what the nature of this book of mine is, or would fain be. I had hoped that each of these studies would complete its companions; and that, without need for explicit explanation, my whole idea would have become more plain to others than it was at that time even to myself. But instead, it has become obvious that the more carefully I had sought to reduce each question to unity, the more that question subdivided and connected itself with other questions; and that, with the solution of each separate problem, had arisen a new set of problems which infinitely complicated the main lessons to be deduced from a study of that many-sided civilization to which, remembering the brilliant and mysterious offspring of Faustus and Helena, I have given the name of

Euphorion. Hence, as it seems, the necessity for a few further words of explanation.

In those introductory pages written some fifteen months ago, I tried to bring home to the reader a sense which has haunted me throughout the writing of this volume ; namely, that instead of having deliberately made up my mind to study the Renaissance, as one makes up one's mind to visit Greece or Egypt or the Holy Land ; I have, on the contrary, quite accidentally and unconsciously, found myself wandering about in spirit among the monuments of this particular historic region, even as I might wander about in the streets of Siena where I wrote last year, of Florence whence I write at present ; wandering about among these things, and little by little feeling a particular interest in one, then in another, according as each happened to catch my fancy or to recall some already known thing. Now these, which for want of a better word I have just called monuments, and just now, less clearly, but also less foolishly, merely *things*—these things were in reality not merely individual and really existing buildings, books, pictures, or statues, individual and really registered men, women, and events ; they were the mental conceptions which I had extracted out of these realities ; the intellectual types made up (as the mediæval symbols of justice are made up of the visible paraphernalia, robe, scales and sword, for judging and weighing and punishing) of the impressions left on the mind by all those buildings

or books, or pictures, or statues, or men, women, and events. They were not the iniquities of this particular despot nor the scandalous sayings of that particular humanist, but the general moral chaos of the Italian fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ; not the poem of Pulci, of Boiardo, of Ariosto in especial, but a vast imaginary poem made up of them all ; not the mediæval saints of Angelico and the pagan demi-gods of Michael Angelo, but the two tremendous abstractions : the spirit of Mediævalism in art, and the spirit of Antiquity ; the interest in the distressed soul, and the interest in the flourishing body. And, as my thoughts have gone back to Antiquity and onwards to our own times, their starting-point has nevertheless been the Tuscan art of the fifteenth century, their nucleus some notes on busts by Benedetto da Maiano and portraits by Raphael.

My *dramatis personæ* have been modes of feeling and forms of art. I have tried to explain the life and character, not of any man or woman, but of the moral scepticism of Italy, of the tragic spirit of our Elizabethan dramatists ; I have tried to write the biography of the romance poetry of the Middle Ages, of the realism of the great portrait painters and sculptors of the Renaissance. But these, my *dramatis personæ*, are, let me repeat it, abstractions : they exist only in my mind and in the minds of those who think like myself. Hence, like all abstractions, they represent the essence of a question, but not its completeness, its

many-sidedness as we may see it in reality. Hence it is that I have frequently passed over exceptions to the rule which I was stating, because the explanation of these exceptions would have involved the formulating of a number of apparently irrelevant propositions ; so that any one who please may accuse me of inexactness ; and, to give an instance, cover the margins of my essay on Mediæval Love with a whole list of virtuous love stories of the Middle Ages ; or else ferret out of Raynouard and Von der Hagen a dozen pages of mediæval poems in praise of rustic life. These objections will be perfectly correct, and (so far as my knowledge permitted me) I might have puzzled the reader with them myself ; but it remains none the less certain that, in the main, mediæval love was not virtuous, and mediæval peasantry not admired by poets ; and none the less certain, I think, also, that in describing the characteristics and origin of an abstract thing, such as mediæval love, or mediæval feeling towards the country and country folk, it was my business to state the rule and let alone the exceptions.

There is another matter which gives me far greater concern. In creating and dealing with an abstraction, one is frequently forced, if I may use the expression, to cut a subject in two, to bring one of its sides into full light and leave the other in darkness ; nay, to speak harshly of one side of an art or of a man without being able to speak admiringly of another side.

This one-sidedness, this apparent injustice of judgment, has in some cases been remedied by the fact that I have treated in one study those things which I was forced to omit in another study ; as, in two separate essays, I have pointed out first the extreme inferiority of Renaissance sculpture to the sculpture of Antiquity with regard to absolute beauty of form ; and then the immeasurable superiority of Renaissance over antique sculpture in the matter of that beauty and interest dependent upon mere arrangement and handling, wherein lies the beauty-creating power of realistic schools. But most often I have shown one side, not merely of an artist or an art, but of my own feeling, without showing the other ; and in one case this inevitable one-sidedness has weighed upon me almost like personal guilt, and has almost made me postpone the publication of this book to the Greek Kalends, in hopes of being able to explain and to atone. I am alluding to Fra Angelico. I spoke of him in a study of the progress of mere beautiful form, the naked human form moreover, in the art of the Renaissance ; I looked at his work with my mind full of the unapproachable superiority of antique form ; I judged and condemned the artist with reference to that superb movement towards nature and form and bodily beauty which was the universal movement of the fifteenth century ; I lost patience with this saint because he would not turn pagan ; I pushed aside, because he did not seek for a classic Olympus, his exquisite dreams

of a mediæval Paradise. I had taken part, as its chronicler, with the art which seeks mere plastic perfection, the art to which Angelico said, "Retro me Sathana." It was my intention to close even this volume with a study of the poetical conception of early Renaissance painting, of that strange kind of painting in which a thing but imperfect in itself, a mere symbol of lovely ideas, brings home to our mind, with a rush of associations, a sense of beauty and wonder greater perhaps than any which we receive from the sober reality of perfect form. Again, there are the German masters—the great engravers, Kra-nach, Altdorfer, Aldegrever, especially ; of whom, for their absolute pleasure in ugly women, for their filthy delight in horrors, I have said an immense amount of ill ; and of whom, for their wonderful intuition of dramatic situation, their instinct of the poetry of common things, and their magnificently imaginative rendering of landscape, I hope some day to say an equal amount of good.

I have spoken of the lesson which may be derived from studies even as humble as these studies of mine ; since, in my opinion, we cannot treat history as a mere art—though history alone can give us now-a-days tragedy which has ceased to exist on our stage, and wonder which has ceased to exist in our poetry—we cannot seek in it mere selfish enjoyment of imagination and emotion, without doing our soul the great injury of cheating it of some of those great indigna-

tions, some of those great lessons which make it stronger and more supple in the practical affairs of life. Each of these studies of mine brings its own lesson, artistic or ethical, important or unimportant ; its lesson of seeking certainty in our moral opinions, beauty in all and whatever our forms of art, spirituality in our love. But besides these I seem to perceive another deduction, an historical fact with a practical application ; to see it as the result not merely perhaps of the studies of which this book is the fruit, but of those further studies, of the subtler sides of Mediæval and Renaissance life and art which at present occupy my mind and may some day add another series of essays to this : a lesson still vague to myself, but which, satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily, I shall nevertheless attempt to explain ; if indeed it requires to be brought home to the reader.

Of the few forms of feeling and imagination which I have treated—things so different from one another as the feeling for nature and the chivalric poem, as modern art, with its idealism and realism, and modern love—of these forms, emotional and artistic, which Antiquity did not know, or knew but little, the reader may have observed that I have almost invariably traced the origin deep into that fruitful cosmopolitan chaos, due to the mingling of all that was still unused of the remains of Antiquity with all that was untouched of the intellectual and moral riches of the barbarous nations, to which we give

the name of Middle Ages ; and that I have, as invariably, followed the development of these precious forms, and their definitive efflorescence and fruit-bearing, into that particular country where certain mediæval conditions had ceased to exist, namely Italy. In other words, it has seemed to me that the things which I have studied were originally produced during the Middle Ages, and consequently in the mediæval countries, France, Germany, Provence ; but did not attain maturity except in that portion of the Middle Ages which is mediæval no longer, but already more than half modern, the Renaissance, which began in Italy not with the establishment of despotisms and the coming of Greek humanists, but with the independence of the free towns and with the revival of Roman tradition.

Why so? Because, it appears to me, after watching the lines of my thought converging to this point, because, with a few exceptions, the Middle Ages were rich in great beginnings (indeed a good half of all that makes up our present civilization seems to issue from them) : but they were poor in complete achievements ; full of the seeds of modern institutions, arts, thoughts, and feelings, they yet show us but rarely the complete growth of any one of them : a fruitful Nile flood, but which must cease to drown and to wash away, which must subside before the germs that it has brought can shoot forth and mature. The sense of this comes home to me most powerfully

whenever I think of mediæval poetry and mediæval painting.

The songs of the troubadours and minnesingers, what are they to our feelings? They are pleasant, even occasionally beautiful, but they are empty, lamentably empty, charming arrangements of words; poetry which fills our mind or touches our heart comes only with the Tuscan lyrists of the thirteenth century. The same applies to mediæval narrative-verse: it is, with one or two exceptions or half exceptions, such as "The Chanson de Roland" and Gottfried's "Tristan und Isolde," decidedly wearisome; a thing to study, but scarcely a thing to delight in. I do not mean to say that the old legends of Wales and Scandinavia, subsequently embodied by the French and German poets of the Middle Ages, are without imaginative or emotional interest; nothing can be further from my thoughts. The Nibelung story possesses, both in the Norse and in the Middle High German version, a tragic fascination; and a quaint fairy-tale interest, every now and then rising to the charm of a Decameronian *novella*, is possessed by many of the Keltic tales, whether briefly told in the Mabinogion or lengthily detailed by Chrestien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach. But all this is the interest of the mere story, and you would enjoy it almost as much if that story were related not by a poet but by a peasant; it is the fascination of the mere theme, with the added fascination of our

own unconscious filling up and colouring of details. And the poem itself, whence we extract this theme, remains, for the most part, uninteresting. The figures are vague, almost shapeless and colourless ; they have no well-understood mental and moral anatomy, so that when they speak and act the writer seems to have no clear conception of the motives or tempers which make them do so ; even as in a child's pictures, the horses gallop, the men run, the houses stand, but without any indication of the muscles which move the horse, of the muscles which hold up the man, of the solid ground upon which is built, nay rather, into which is planted, the house. Hatred of Hagen, devotion of Rüdger, passionate piety of Parzival—all these are things of which we do not particularly see the how or why ; we do not follow the reasons, in event or character, which make these men sacrifice themselves or others, weep, storm, and so forth ; nay, even when these reasons are clear from the circumstances, we are not shown the action of the mechanism, we do not see how Brunhilt is wroth, how Chriemhilt is revengeful, how Herzeloid is devoted to Parzival. There is, in the vast majority of this mediæval poetry, no clear conception of the construction and functions of people's character, and hence no conception either of those actions and reactions of various moral organs which, after all, are at the bottom of the events related. Herein lies the difference between the forms of the Middle Ages and those of Antiquity ; for how per-

fectly felt, understood, is not every feeling and every action of the Homeric heroes, how perfectly indicated ! We can see the manner and reason of the conflict of Achilles and Agamemnon, of the behaviour of the returned Odysseus, as clearly as we see the manner and reason of the movements of the fighting Centaurs and Lapithæ, or the Amazons ; nay, even the minute mood of comparatively unimportant figures, as Helen, Briseïs, and Nausicaa, is indicated in its moral anatomy and attitude as distinctly as is the manner in which the maidens of the Parthenon frieze slowly restrain their steps, the boys curb their steeds, or the old men balance their oil jars. Nothing of this in mediæval literature, except perhaps in "Flamenca" and "Tristan," where the motive of action, mere imaginative desire, is all-permeating and explains everything. These people clearly had no interest, no perception, connected with character: a valorous woman, a chivalrous knight, an insolent steward, a jealous husband, a faithful retainer ; things recognized only in outline, made to speak and act only according to a fixed tradition, without knowledge of the internal mechanism of motive ; these sufficed. Hence it is that mediæval poetry is always like mediæval painting (for painting continued to be mediæval with Giotto's pupils long after poetry had ceased to be mediæval with Dante and his school), where the Virgin sits and holds the child without body wherewith to sit or arms wherewith to hold ; where angels

flutter forward and kneel in conventional greeting, with obviously no bended knees beneath their robes, nay, with knees, waist, armpits, all anywhere ; where men ride upon horses without flat to their back ; where processions of the blessed come forth, guided by fiddling seraphs, vague, faint faces, sweet or grand, heads which might wave like pieces of cut-out paper upon their necks, arms and legs here and there, not clearly belonging to any one ; creatures marching, soaring, flying, singing, fiddling, without a bone or a muscle wherewith to do it all. And meanwhile, in this mediæval poetry, as in this mediæval painting, there are yards and yards of elaborate preciousness : all the embossed velvets, all the white-and-gold-shot brocades, all the silks and satins, and jewel-embroidered stuffs of the universe cast stiffly about these phantom men and women, these phantom horses and horsemen. It is not until we turn to Italy, and to the Northern man, Chaucer, entirely under Italian influence, that we obtain an approach to the antique clearness of perception and comprehension ; that we obtain not only in Dante something akin to the muscularities of Signorelli and Michael Angelo ; but in Boccaccio and Chaucer, in Cavalca and Petrarch, the equivalent of the well-understood movement, the well-indicated situation of the simple, realistic or poetic, sketches of Filippino and Botticelli.

This, you will say, is a mere impression ; it is no explanation, still less such an explanation as may

afford a lesson. Not so. This strange inconclusiveness in all mediæval things, till the moment comes when they cease to be mediæval; this richness in germs and poverty in mature fruit, cannot be without its reason. And this reason, to my mind, lies in one word, the most terrible word of any, since it means suffering and hopelessness; a word which has haunted my mind ever since I have looked into mediæval things: the word Wastefulness. Wastefulness; the frightful characteristic of times at once so rich and so poor, the explanation of the long starvation and sickness that mankind, that all mankind's concerns—art, poetry, science, life—endured while the very things which would have fed and revived and nurtured, existed close at hand, and in profusion. Wastefulness, in this great period of confusion, of the most precious things that we possess: time, thought, and feeling refused to the realities of the world, and lavished on the figments of the imagination. Why this vagueness, this imperfection in all mediæval representations of life? Because even as men's eyes were withdrawn, by the temporal institutions of those days, from the sight of the fields and meadows which were left to the blind and dumb thing called serf; so also the thoughts of mankind, its sympathy and intentions, were withdrawn from the mere earthly souls, the mere earthly wrongs and woes of men by the great self-organized institution of mediæval religion. Pity of the body of Christ held in bondage by the Infidel; love of God; study of the unknowable things of

Heaven: such are the noblest employments of the mediæval soul; how much of pity, of love, may remain for man; how much of study for the knowable? To Wastefulness like this—to misapplication of mind ending almost in palsy—must we ascribe, I think, the strange sterility of such mediæval art as deals not merely with pattern, but with the reality of man's body and soul. And we might be thankful, if, during our wanderings among mediæval things, we had seen the starving of only art and artistic instincts; but the soul of man has lain starving also; starving for the knowledge which was sought only of Divine things, starving for the love which was given only to God.

The explanation, therefore, and its lesson, may thus be summed up in the one word Wastefulness. And the fruitfulness of the Renaissance, all that it has given to us of art, of thought, of feeling (for the "Vita Nuova" is its fruit), is due, as it seems to me, to the fact that the Renaissance is simply the condition of civilization when, thanks to the civil liberty and the spiritual liberty inherited from Rome and inherited from Greece, man's energies of thought and feeling were withdrawn from the unknowable to the knowable, from Heaven to Earth; and were devoted to the developing of those marvellous new things which Antiquity had not known, and which had lain neglected and wasted during the Middle Ages.

FLORENCE, *January*, 1884.

## APPENDIX.



## APPENDIX.



I HAVE seen the pictures and statues and towns which I have described, and I have read the books of which I attempt to give an impression ; but here my original research, if such it may be called, comes to an end. I have trusted only to myself for my impressions ; but I have taken from others everything that may be called historical fact, as distinguished from the history of this or that form of thought or of art which I have tried to elaborate. My references are therefore only to standard historical works, and to such editions of poets and prose writers as have come into my hands. How much I am indebted to the genius of Michelet ; nay, rather, how much I am, however unimportant, the thing made by him, every one will see and judge. With regard to positive information I must express my great obligations to the works of Jacob Burckhardt, of Prof. Villari, and of Mr. J. A. Symonds in everything that concerns the political history and social condition of the Renaissance. Mr. Symonds' name I have placed last, although this is by no means the order of importance in which the three writers appear in my mind, because vanity compels me to state that I have deprived myself of the pleasure and profit of reading his volumes on Italian

literature, from a fear that finding myself doubtless forestalled by him in various appreciations, I might deprive my essays of what I feel to be their principal merit, namely, the spontaneity and wholeness of personal impression. With regard to philological lore, I may refer, among a number of other works, to M. Gaston Paris' work on the Cycle of Charlemagne, M. de la Villemarqué's companion volume on Keltic romances, and Professor Rajna's "Fonti dell' Ariosto." My knowledge of troubadours, trouvères, and minnesingers is obtained mainly from the great collections of Raynouard, Wackernagel, Mätzner, Bartsch, and Von der Hagen, and from Bartsch's and Simrock's editions and versions of Gottfried von Strassburg, Hartmann von Aue, and Wolfram von Eschenbach. "Flamenca" I have read in Professor Paul Meyer's beautiful edition, text and translation; "Aucassin et Nicolette," in an edition published, if I remember rightly, by Janet; and also in a very happy translation contained in Delvau's huge collection of "Romans de Chevalerie," which contains, unfortunately sometimes garbled, as many of the prose stories of the Carolingian and Amadis cycle as I, at all events, could endure to read. For the early Italian poets, excepting Carducci's "Cino da Pistoia," my references are the same as those in Rossetti's "Dante and his Cycle," especially the "Rime Antiche" and the "Poeti del Primo Secolo." Professor d'Ancona's pleasant volume has greatly helped me in the history of the transformation of the courtly poetry of the early Middle Ages into the folk poetry of Tuscany. I owe a good deal also, with regard to this same essay "The Outdoor Poetry," to Roskoff's famous "Geschichte des Teufels," and to Signor Novati's recently published "Carmina Medii Ævi." The Italian *novellieri*, Bandello, Cinthio, and their set, I have used in the Florentine editions of 1820 or 1825; Masuccio edited by De Sanctis. For the essay on the Italian Renaissance on the Elizabethan Stage, I have had recourse, chiefly, to the fifteenth century chronicles in the "Archivio Storico Italiano," and to

Dyce's Webster, Hartley Coleridge's Massinger and Ford, Churton Collins' Cyril Tourneur, and J. O. Halliwell's Marston.

The essays on art have naturally profited by the now inevitable Crowe and Cavalcaselle ; but in this part of my work, while I have relied very little on books, I have received more than the equivalent of the information to be obtained from any writers in the suggestions and explanations of my friend Mr. T. Nelson MacLean, who has made it possible for a mere creature of pens and ink to follow the differences of *technique* of the sculptors and medallists of the fifteenth century ; a word of thanks also, for various such suggestions as can come only from a painter, to my old friend Mr. John S. Sargent, of Paris.

I must conclude these acknowledgments by thanking the Editors of the *Contemporary*, *British Quarterly*, and *National Reviews*, and of the *Cornhill Magazine*, for permission to republish such of the essays or fragments of essays as have already appeared in those periodicals.

THE END.

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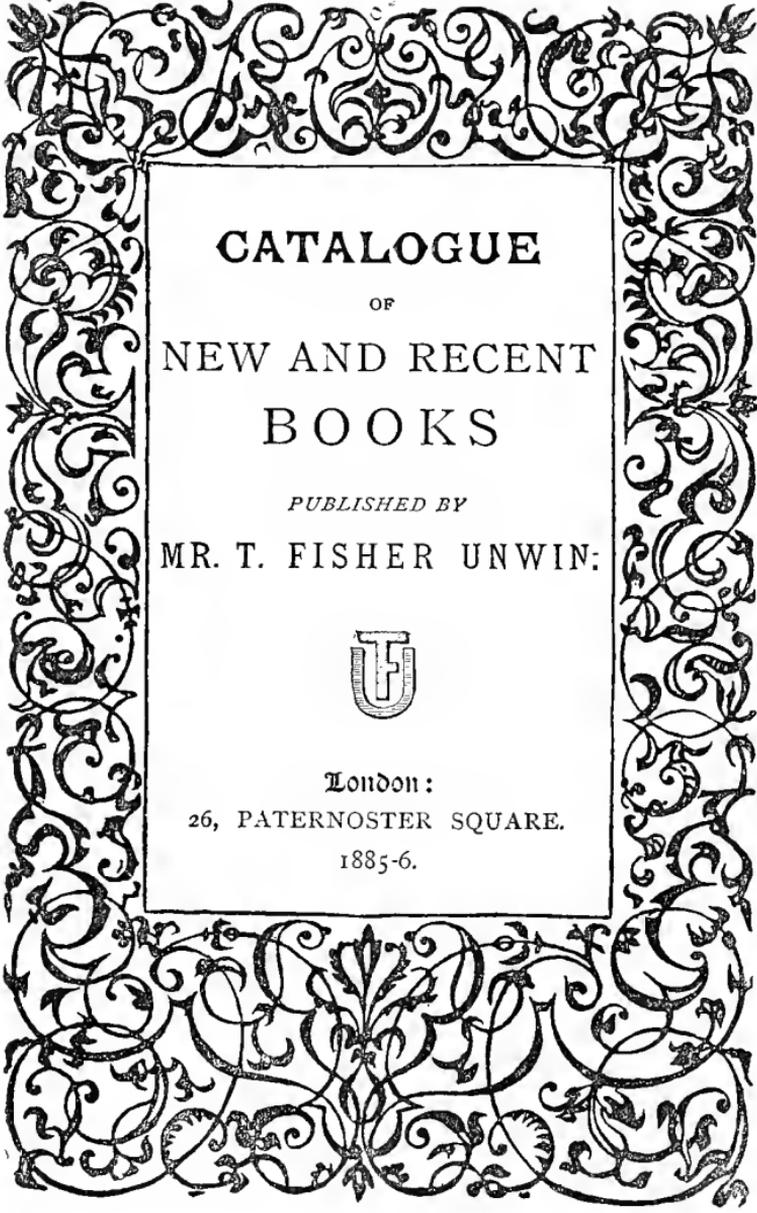
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